From *The Final Passage* (1985) to *In the Falling Snow* (2009):

Caryl Phillips as a Second Generation Postcolonial Author

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Preface

It has been almost two years since I was first introduced to Caryl Phillips’ work by Prof. Dr. Ledent through his novel Cambridge (1999). Though I was not yet convinced by this novel, being somewhat taken aback by the reproduction of nineteenth century prose, a month later Phillips’ imaginative world managed to charm me. On a cold wintry night, in one of the classrooms at the University of Liège where I was studying at the time, Caryl Phillips read “Growing Pains” and a sample of his at the time still unpublished In the Falling Snow (2009). I was mesmerised by his voice, his Yorkshire accent and how he described his youth and the gradual discovery of literature and writing, beginning with words like ‘glistening’ and ‘glittering’ to reading James Baldwin’s play Blues for Mister Charlie (1964). I could feel and see the distance between Keith and Laurie on the London Eye, the cold standing on London Bridge and the careful attempts at conversation. Once the novel was published at the beginning of the following summer I was eager to lay my hands on it and immerse myself in the story in one reading. This was not what I expected, based on the fragment I had heard read aloud by that voice that seemed to be inextricably linked with the story now. After reading this latest novel, I went back to his first, The Final Passage (1985), and worked my way chronologically through his oeuvre during the summer. Though never a smooth read, every other work had read ‘smoother’ than In the Falling Snow (2009). Something was different, and at the same time it was not. When several months later Prof. Dr. Ledent proposed to start from this novel for my master’s thesis, I willingly agreed. I loved the contemporaneity of the novel and the opportunity to start from a rather blank slate, since this novel had not been tackled by a huge list of academics yet, as the novel was simply too recent. I have reread the novel several times since then, and grew to love it somewhat more after each reading. In the Falling Snow (2009) is without a doubt a very rich and topical novel, written by that socially engaged and at the same time personal voice that embodied the literality of Phillips’ work since that – for me in the meantime – mythical evening. Phillips is without a doubt engaged in society, not as a missionary or a charity worker, but by voicing his critical human opinions, which is a feature I recognise in myself. Since I joined an exchange programme in high school with South-Africa, a series of events in my own life of the last few years have entangled me in the subject of a multicultural society on a personal level as well. Even though I would never transplant these on my academic work, feeling some connection to Phillips’ engagement helps to become engrossed in his work and his views on society as being filled with cultural plurality and striving for an understanding that every single person is different and constituted by so many denominators, transgressing the reductive labels of nationality, colour and race. I can only hope that by reading my work Phillips’ vision of cultural and personal plurality will shine through and that another reader may thus be added to Phillips’ cause.

Rini Vyncke
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# List of Abbreviations

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1 For full references of these sources, see the Works Cited List on page 120.
1.1 A Revaluation and Reassessment of Phillips and his recent *In the Falling Snow* (2009)

Since the emergence of several postcolonial authors a century ago, a lot has been said and written about postcoloniality in an interdisciplinary discourse we might call Postcolonial Studies. In a short summary I will attempt to display the familiarity with which we talk about postcolonial authors nowadays. What has not been widely tackled yet, on the other hand, is the recently emerged second generation of postcolonial authors. In this case, second generation signifies that a particular writer belongs to the “Britons raised in Britain, often since birth, who came to possess an emotional and identitarian relationship with the nation different from that of their migrant parents” (McLeod 9). ² Admittedly, second generation authors such as Andrea Levy only begun to write quite recently, ³ therefore less time has passed for critics to be able to research their work. Nonetheless, Caryl Phillips, who was probably one of the first of his generation, published his debut novel *The Final Passage* already in 1985. A look at The Caryl Phillips Bibliography, a site on which both primary and secondary sources are collected, shows a considerable amount of researchers have been occupied with Phillips, yet a reading audience still fails to recognise his name, let alone assign a second generation label to his work. Therefore it would be too optimistic to consider Phillips as belonging to the mainstream in the same way as first generation postcolonial authors are recognised and considered a part of the literary canon nowadays. Moreover, even though critics have been researching his work, considering his second generation reality, they

² Further use of the term second generation implies the specification of ‘second generation postcolonial British immigrants’, as meant in the given definition (McLeod 9). Obviously, second generation postcolonial migrants exist in other countries than the UK as well. The term second generation can be used to refer to the offspring of parents who have immigrated to any particular country, but is used to denote the offspring of traumatised parents, for example, survivors of the Holocaust, as well. Moreover, in a lot of cases these second generation migrants are treated inferior or as foreigners because they are black as well.

³ Andrea Levy was born in the UK from Jamaican parents who migrated in the forties. Her debut novel *Every Light in the House burnin’* was published in 1994.
often fail to move beyond stating the historical facts and Phillips’ ambiguous feelings of belonging which are expressed through a cultural plurality. However, as I will argue, a lot of these reductive readings are due to Phillips himself. His share in this reading is twofold. On the one hand he hardly ever writes about second generation characters, but rather prefers to return to previous generations and other equally displaced characters. Besides, Phillips is extremely selective in the information he shares about himself. Almost every interview and thus almost every piece of research states the same facts and anecdotes over and over again. Admittedly, literary work should be read separately from the writer in order not to simply implement the writer’s comments and life on the novel. However, postcolonial writers will always be more prone to such approaches since their main theme of writing usually addresses their own postcolonial predicament. In other words, even though their personal experiences will always influence postcolonial authors in what they are writing about, critics should be aware of how these writers may consciously choose to narrate or keep secret certain elements to serve the reception of their own literary work. Phillips, for example, is a master in displaying what may be convenient and disguising what is not to the story in which he wants to situate his literary work. Therefore I will commence with a portrait of Phillips before moving on to his work in order to show the myth that he has carefully created about himself and which draws a clear parallel with his earlier work. Recently, however, his latest novel, dealing with a second generation character, may seem to have finally undermined this myth, since its main character reveals more about growing up and living as a second generation migrant in the UK than Phillips himself has ever done. Ironically, when The Final Passage (1985) was published the recurrent question asked was why Phillips went back to the first generation instead of writing about his own generation which was so politically topical at the time. However, now he has finally tackled the second generation straightforwardly in In the Falling Snow (2009), this novel has been received quite coolly by reviewers and readers alike.
On a more positive note, on the other hand, we encounter Donna Seaman’s words, for example:

This magnetizing tale of fathers and sons, the search for home, and the forging of the self is Phillips’ most straightforward and intimate novel yet about the poison of racism and xenophobia, treachery and rescue, and the failure to love. A writer with a profound sense of history, Phillips does “now” with brio in the latest in an exceptionally lyrical and piercing body of work (Booklist 29).

Whether these critics deemed his latest novel not worthy of review and criticised it for being too bleak or suffering from an overdetermined plot, or explicitly putting the emphasis for the first time on the “now”, their reactions point in the direction of a changed perception of this novel in regard to Phillips’ earlier work. In my opinion, this novel might be one of Phillips’ richest and most interesting works so far since he finally focuses on more than one generation at a time, living together in the same period. Though a lot of his work describes more than one situation in place and time, we hardly ever see how two situations, or – more precisely – two generations interact with each other. Moreover, a glimpse of the third generation and its interaction with the second is provided here as well, which even makes the picture somewhat fuller. This raises the question whether In the Falling Snow is indeed a break away from Phillips’ earlier work or still inhabits a continuum with what has been published before this most recent novel. Moreover, it might be interesting to take a look at this latest novel since it finally seems to move beyond the myth Phillips has created around himself and his work, which did not overtly include the second generation aspects of his personal life, though it is indispensable at the same time for creating his deeply rooted and ambiguous feelings of belonging and unbelonging. Through an in depth analysis of In the Falling Snow (2009) I will attempt a revaluation of this so far almost neglected novel. I will start with the treatment of several generations through the characters of respectively Keith, Earl and Laurie,
encapsulating all three generations, and continue with the themes of communication, or rather the lack thereof, and appearances and roles assigned in society. These themes and the foregrounded presence of several generations will serve to interpret the essence of Keith as a second generation protagonist. Through this analysis it might become clear that besides the new theme of interacting generations In the Falling Snow (2009) harbours several other themes which are inherently recurrent in Phillips’ work as well. In other words, In the Falling Snow (2009) does not seem to be such a clear-cut break from Phillips’ earlier work as some reviewers would suggest. In order to attempt to bring this argument further across, I will also compare In the Falling Snow (2009) with The Final Passage (1985), a novel which is still overtly inscribed in the historical myth of unbelonging that Phillips has created about himself and his own work. Moreover, The Final Passage (1985) bears a strong resemblance with the story which can be found inside the fifth chapter of In the Falling Snow (2009), as a story which can be found inside another story. However, even if we move beyond this story within a story similarities can be found between the two novels, which might suggest an occupation with the second generation even at the moment of his debut novel, narrating the migratory experience of the first generation. To explore this suggestion even further I will also use the almost unresearched eponymous tv adaptation The Final Passage (1996) which was made of the novel in order to try to show that the second generation, explicitly present in the frame story added to the adaptation, though not explicitly displayed in his novels, has been on Phillips’ mind even before he dealt with it straightforwardly in In the Falling Snow (2009).
2. The Emergence of a Second Postcolonial Generation

At the end of the 19th century and mainly during the 20th century the emergence of several postcolonial authors led to a redefinition of English Literature. To answer the question where English literature is produced Walkowitz, for example, paraphrases Viswanathan:4

Her answer—not only ‘in England, of course’—focuses on the genealogy of the discipline, its development within the British Empire and other dominions outside England through the education of colonial subjects and the efforts of strangers such as ‘Jews, Dissenters, and Catholics’ (23). But her answer also focuses on the dynamic relationship between ‘sites of cultural production and institutionalization,’ the way that ‘English literature’ names a mode of analysis and a collection of works as well as the way that modes of analysis establish collections. In fact, she suggests, there is no ‘English literature’ before institutionalization: only with disciplinary protocols do cultural products become a field (20). ‘Where is English literature produced?’ thus asks us to consider that the location of literature depends not only on the places where books are written but also on the places where they are classified and given social purpose (527).

In the 19th century, it was not evident that English literature was also written outside of England, not to mention that the institutionalisation of migratory writers should be considered. Obviously, the question ‘What is English Literature?’ is the basis of a never-ending debate, since there is no static answer or definition to be given. Rather it is subject to a continual, though gradual, change. In this case a change that is embodied by the emergence of writers not necessarily born and/or resident in the UK, such as Joseph Conrad, for example. Though Conrad cannot be called postcolonial unproblematically, he can at least be seen as a

bridge to those postcolonial writers who came after him. Conrad travelled on a variety of continents on numerous British ships and transformed these journeys through the colonial world into fiction. “Conrad witnessed at close range the workings of European empires, including the British, French, Belgian, Dutch, and German, that at the time controlled most of the earth’s surface and were extracting from it vast quantities of raw materials and profiting from forced or cheap labor” (NAF 1885-1886). Consequently, Conrad was still deeply inscribed in the colonial period. Nonetheless, he made some attempts to question the ethics employed during colonialism. Conrad’s work “opened up new possibilities for imaginative literature in English”, thus influencing later writers such as Chinua Achebe and V. S. Naipaul, directly or indirectly lending a voice to the inhabitants of the colonial map consisting of Africa, the Caribbean and India (NAF 1886-1887). Concerning Africa, the Nigerian Achebe “effectively changed many of the West’s entrenched impressions of African life and culture, replacing simplistic stereotypes with portrayals of a complex society still suffering from a legacy of Western colonial oppression” (NAF 2622). Wole Soyinka, the first black writer winning the Nobel-prize, actively tried to intermingle the inheritance of his African ancestry with the paradigms of Western society, where he gained his education. Besides Nadine Gordimer, the best known South African writer is probably J.M. Coetzee who reflectingly describes the oppression caused by colonialism in South Africa, although this country has its own peculiar history of colonisation, slightly different from the rest of Africa. Derek Walcott, on the other hand, was a writer born in the West Indies instead of in Africa and felt divided between his “Afro-Caribbean and European inheritances” (NAF 2586). An author like Kamau Brathwaite equally did not only return to his West Indian decent. He went beyond the Caribbean and “sought to recover and revaluate the African inheritance in the Caribbean” (NAF 2523). Accordingly, the well-known V.S. Naipaul, was born in the West Indies, but

5 For full titles, see the Abbreviations List on page 5. For full references, see the Works Cited List on page 120.
was at the same time split between his Indian inheritance and the impositions of the British coloniser as well. Jean Rhys, born on the colonised Caribbean island Dominica migrated to the UK when aged seventeen. After writing several works about young independent women, mainly set in Paris and London, she wrote her master piece *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), thus responding to the Caribbean islands of her childhood and answering to Charlotte Brontë’s ignorance of the madwoman in the attic in *Jane Eyre* (1847), thereby setting up a trend that was called ‘the Empire Writing Back’. Besides, English postcolonial writers emerged from colonised India, such as the poet A. K. Ramanujan. Despite their geographical differences, all these writers have in common a certain knowledge and experience about both their place and culture of birth and the Western culture of their coloniser. In the 21st century, however, people who migrated to the mother country have children who were born and grew up in a Western society where they are regarded as outsiders because of their foreign ancestry, cultural heritage or simply their complexion, failing at the same time to feel connected to their parents’ past, country and traditions.

The emergence of this second generation, inherently divided between two or more societies, may initiate a new genre of literature once again, thus responding to the era of globalisation and multiculturalisation. While the first generation postcolonial writers also dealt with the themes of interculturality, racism and a plural identity, the second generation added the issue of not having another country or culture to which they could return to this list. While the first generation of post-colonial writers were equally at a loss about the dual formation of their identity, it remained clear what was part of their own, of ‘their people’, and what was imported or duplicated from the white Western coloniser. Phillips’ generation, on the other hand, are left with nothing of ‘their own’. In fact, the country of the former white Western coloniser is now ‘their own’, since they have never lived in another society in either the Caribbean, India, or Africa for a considerable amount of years like their parents had done
before they migrated. Because of this reality a second generation writer such as Phillips will be intrinsically different from the first generation, which can be illustrated by a characteristic Sáez assigns to first generation postcolonial writers: Sáez criticises the first generation for “the negative depiction of the migrant male [who returns] to the Caribbean after having lived in exile in order to participate in or incite political change, only to emerge at the end of their struggles as tragic failures” (17). She assigns this literary motif to a symptom “of a residual anticolonialist attitude among Caribbean writers still obsessed with resistance” (17). Such a critique may appear to be inapplicable then to the work of such writers as Phillips, who are left without a possibility to return, since they have never lived there in the first place, and who do not need to resist a coloniser anymore, but must combat the prejudices of the Western society they are living in themselves nowadays. The question remains whether this is indeed reflected in Phillips’ literary work.

After several plays, Phillips writes his first novels in the eighties. In The Final Passage (1985) a young couple decides to migrate to Britain. The young woman, Leila, at first “was ‘Othered’ for being both a colonised woman in her own country” and being more pale than the other inhabitants because her father was a white coloniser (Silku 167). Then after she emigrated she was ‘Othered’ again “for being an immigrant in England” (Silku 167). Consequently, she ends up greatly disillusioned in this new country where she “desperately [yearned] to adopt a new identity and start a new life in another place” (Silku 167). Similarly, in A State of Independence (1986) Bertram Francis fails to acquire the life he imagined after migrating to the UK twenty years ago. Nonetheless, visiting his island of birth that is on the verge of independence and suffers from neocolonialism, he feels equally displaced and out of

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6 Though it must be acknowledged that Phillips lived in St Kitts in 1988-1989 at the age of thirty, this remains insufficient to become fully engaged in this society such as people who were born and raised there and lived there for almost twenty years before they emigrated. Or to vary on McLeod’s words: the first generation who lived for at least two decades on their Caribbean island will “possess an emotional and identitarian relationship” with their island different than those who lived their only for a short period of time (9). In The South Bank Show (see Works Cited List) Phillips admits, for example, that although he was a black man walking between black men in St Kitts they could distinguish him as being a British foreigner, simply by the way he walked.
place at ‘home’. A superficial reading of these storylines may remind us of the failure of the black migrant if we do not consider the openness of both endings. As Timothy Bewes correctly declares, “[r]ather than corrective narratives, telling a previously untold or mistold story about the past, Phillips’s works are caught up in a drama of literary possibility that is riveted to their contemporaneity” (35-36). Although Leila speaks of returning to the Caribbean island, there is no evidence to be found that she will actually return. Nor is it obvious whether Bertram will seize the opportunity he is offered to stay on the island with his childhood sweetheart. If all should return, ending as failures, how then did there ever emerge a second generation composed by men and women such as Phillips himself? Instead of solely telling a pessimistic story about the disillusions related to the discrepancy between the expectations and reality for mid-twentieth century migrants, Phillips tells a tale filled with possibilities for their future, though one not easily spared from hardships.

After these first two novels, which palpably “focus on the tense interaction between the Caribbean and Britain through the figures of migrants, [his] later novels tackle wider-ranging topics” from slavery to anti-Semitism and asylum seekers (Ledent “MA” 2). By casting such a wide variety of outsiders Phillips covertly illustrates the impossibility of what people regard as a definition of Englishness. By exhibiting the ‘un-English’ members of society in the past, it is artistically stated that these outsiders have always been present in English society, and thus even constitute this society as ‘insiders’, though they are not regarded as such. In other words, Phillips’ type of “narratives of diasporic dislocation and relocation [have] greatly contributed to the restructuring of the cosmopolitan space as well as recontextualizing literature produced under the impact of post-war migratory experience” (Silku 165). This cosmopolitan space where other ethnicities are visibly present results from a history of migration, international trade and wars instead of being a completely new development in contemporary society. Therefore the people belonging to these other
ethnicities have the right to ‘claim’ their Englishness despite their complexion, religion or traditions. They are no longer migrants themselves, but the outcome of a society that should commence to regard itself based on an inclusive vision of who its members are in order to correspond with the reality of its existence. As Catherine Bateson explained in Peripheral Visions (1994), quoted by Pinxten:

Membership in a human family or community is an artefact, something that has to be made, not a biological given. Membership both acknowledges and bridges separateness, for it is constructed across a gap of mutual incomprehension, depending on the willingness to join in and be changed by a common dance (187).

In Phillips’ essays it becomes clear that he laments the ignorance that blinds society to such an approach. Nonetheless, in his literature he steers clear of accusatory statements and lecturing. Instead, Phillips’ fluid and fragmented narratives, the nuanced plurality of voices and the lack of a judging authorial narrator show that he does not write to choose sides or pass judgement, but rather to raise both awareness of the rich complexity of society and empathy towards other people and their story, regardless of their skin colour. Bewes states that “[w]riting is one of the major ways in which we place ourselves before the other, or (which amounts to the same thing) represent others to ourselves—or indeed, ourselves to ourselves” (40). Likewise, reading Phillips’ writing is a way of representing others to ourselves in such a way that we will see ourselves represented back to us in the end. We will face his characters as our own and start to integrate them in our perception of society, which will gradually lead to an inclusive approach to membership.

Since “migration always already destabilises any preconceived, modern notions of nation and identity”, the presence of Phillips’ generation emphasises this destabilisation even more, thus urgently asking for a reconciliation of these faulty preconceived notions (Frances R. Aparicio 636-7). In his work, Phillips proposes new “notions of nation and identity” by
being aware of “[t]he power of language and discourse” and consequently applying “[t]he postmodern resistance to possessing the truth and [to] a strong, poetic impulse towards totalizing paradigms that verge on allegory and mythmaking” (Frances R Aparicio 640). He is not concerned with imposing a truth, but with truthfully displaying the plurality at stake in every situation, which is equally reflected in the polyphony and richness of the form of his novels. Bewes characterises Phillips’ way of writing as follows:

Not only are his stories told entirely through the words and reflections of his characters; those characters are themselves, for reasons that are never specified, incapable of speaking “authentically”, on their own account or in their own voices. As a result, these works have a curiously disembodied quality, despite the fact that, in the most literal sense, every word and idea is “embodied” in the verbalizations or thoughts of the characters (43).

Nowhere in the novels does the writer, nor the narrator, pass judgement on characters or situations. Bénédicte Ledent states that “the self-reflexive and the political acumen” in Phillips’ non-fiction is exactly what “the narrative technique and the lyricism of [his fiction] tend to subdue” (“MA” 6). For lack of an authoritative guide, only characters express their judgements upon others. It is therefore up to the reader to judge for himself whether or not to share a character’s opinion or to judge a situation differently. To avoid imposing an authorial voice on his readers, Phillips chooses to apply a technique that can be called ventriloquism. Bewes explains this as a technique that “enables a ‘proliferation’ of voices, particularly in the works of diasporic or ‘black Atlantic’ writers whose country of origin might be said to be multiple or diffuse” (46). Although the Caribbean with its diffuse character is one of Phillips’ important roots, I argue that it is rather because of his second generation affinities, which leave him with an altered perspective on English nationality and the awareness of a rising
cultural plurality in contemporary societies, that he chooses to depict such a variety of nuanced voices.

In the same way as Phillips refuses to pin down his narrative to a fixed interpretation, for that would mean he denies the rich plurality of people and society that he is actually trying to portray, he has always avoided to pin down his characters as voices belonging to the second generation. If Phillips only focused on the second generation, he would endlessly simplify the history that leads up to the presence of a contemporary cosmopolitan space with multiple ethnicities of which his second generation constitutes only a part. Phillips has therefore concentrated on, for example, the history of slavery in Higher Ground (1989), Cambridge (1991) and Crossing the River (1993) and on other migrants such as an asylum seeker in A Distant Shore (2003) and American entertainer Bert Williams in Dancing in the Dark (2005). Admittedly, the second generation was mentioned occasionally, such as in his first novel The Final Passage (1985). Nonetheless, Leila’s toddler son Calvin and her unborn child, to whom she fails to explain why Santa Claus is white instead of coloured, are both too young and not given any explicit voice (202-203). Already after the publication of this first novel, “a few, admittedly prescriptive, commentators wondered why Phillips, the son of post-Empire Windrush immigrants from the Caribbean had not tackled in his first novel the predicament of his own generation who had come of age during Mrs Thatcher’s infamous era” (Ledent “DA” n. pag.). It is only recently, with his latest novel In the Falling Snow (2009), that Phillips has created a second generation protagonist set in the contemporary UK. Both his novels and his essays express his committed vision regarding multicultural contemporary societies. He is convinced that in every human being, situation and society a nuanced plurality is hidden and a one-sided view on either of these will always be restrictive. He therefore displays a cast of diverse characters whose identity cannot conform to a simplified label. Moreover, by exhibiting the fluidity of their feelings, thoughts and history, which transgress any restrictive
boundary one could invent, Phillips’ work enables us to sympathise with those who we would otherwise label as ‘others’ or ‘strangers’. Though Phillips advocates this humane vision strongly, there seems to be a discrepancy with the carefully polished ‘myth’ he uses to portray himself in the media. This portrait, though plural, seems to be too labelled and too restrictive. Nonetheless, this portrait fits perfectly when summing up the subjects dealt with in his earlier novels.
3. The Importance of Cultural Plurality in Caryl Phillips’ Vision

3.1 Caryl Phillips: Growing Up “of, and not of, this Place”

Phillips’ biography, for example in Caryl Phillips (2002) by Bénédicte Ledent, reads that he was born in the Eastern Caribbean country of St Kitts in 1958. Only twelve weeks after he was born his parents migrated to the United Kingdom. After their arrival, Phillips mostly grew up in Leeds, in a white working class-area, where he and his three younger brothers belonged to a black minority. Even though, “[l]ike many first-generation immigrants, his parents chose to downplay their origins so as not to hinder their children’s integration into the host society”, and Phillips’ “cultural heritage did not, therefore, dramatically clash with the education he received”, Leeds will be the first place where the continuing ambiguity in his life, linked to the question of belonging, will become apparent (Ledent, Caryl Phillips 2). In “Growing Pains” Phillips narrates how he was the only black boy at school at the age of five and gazes were fixed upon him when their teacher “read them a tale about Little Black Sambo” (F22). Even more striking is the ironic image he portrays in the introduction of A New World Order (2001). At the age of seven he was chased and he defends himself by saying “I am not a chocolate biscuit”, after which he enters the cinema and stands to “listen to the turgid tones of ‘God Save the Queen’” (4). Luckily, this was also the same age at which he discovered the imaginative world of fiction and he gained his first compliment about a story he had written (“Growing Pains” F22). The ambiguity he experienced for the first time

7 Phillips’ much quoted phrase from his introduction to A New World Order (2001).
8 Since at the age of twelve weeks Phillips was still too young to remember anything of his parents’ former country and thus was fully educated in the environment of a British society, Phillips is still regarded as second generation, though technically he was not actually born in the UK. Cfr. also McLeod’s definition given on page 6: “black Britons raised in Britain, often since birth, who came to possess an emotional and identitarian relationship with the nation different from that of their migrant parents” (9).
in Leeds became the thread of his life, which Phillips concisely expresses in the enchanting and often repeated phrase: “I am of, and not of, this place” (NWO 1-6).

The reasons causing Phillips’ feelings of unbelonging in Leeds seem obvious. The colour of his parents’ skin continually emphasised that they were Caribbean immigrants and therefore their family always felt under scrutiny in this all-white estate. Moreover, people continually underestimated Phillips’ intellectual abilities because of his background. Nonetheless, Phillips and his parents did not resign that easily, and these frequent understatements only meant that they would try even more fervently to prove them wrong. For example, they would make a party piece out of Phillips as a five-year old, baffling their guests by reciting all the names of the teams in the English First Division (NWO 298). As Phillips says in an episode of The South Bank Show, he “never allowed [himself] to hide behind the restrictive door of race”. Despite the hardships he felt growing up because of his skin colour Phillips was not a lonely child. He was quite popular at school, making friends easily, certainly if it came down to football mates. He could run fast and possessed rustic, but efficient, football skills. One of his earliest memories, he claims, is looking down on Elland Road, the playing field of Leeds United. Later it became a weekly habit to support the team of Leeds United, which was thriving at the time. Phillips was “hooked. [He] was ‘Leeds’, and with this firm declaration of faith the cultural gap between [his cricket-loving parents and himself] opened still further” (NWO 298). Moreover, Phillips was aware that he was the only black fan there amidst the slightly racist chants, certainly when black players started joining English football teams and fans became openly hostile and racist towards them. Because of this, Phillips “often flirted with the idea of not coming back again, but for all the ups and downs, all the occasional betrayals, this ground, this team, represents England to [him], represents belonging, represents being rooted, being recognised, and recognising where I am and why I’m here” (SBS). Equally, after retracing his parents’ migrating journey for The
Atlantic Sound,⁹ seeing the White Cliffs of Dover he was suddenly overcome with this profound feeling that it did not matter how many times people or politicians said to ‘go home’, ‘go back to where you come from’, he knew he belonged there, he was arriving home. Moreover, his affiliation with Leeds United emphasises that next to his skin colour he was also a working-class kid from North Leeds. Even if his almost tribal support of Leeds United contained an inherent paradox for him as a black kid, Leeds was his hometown and formed him in many ways just as well as his skin colour did.

Accordingly, Phillips describes his arrival at Queen’s College Oxford as “a profound wake up call”, not because the other students could not grasp the synthesis of him being black and having this Yorkshire accent, but simply because he “had never met anybody who had been to a public school [or] who had travelled abroad” and as a lot of working-class kids he felt somewhat “socially inadequate” (SBS). Additionally, he was a black student in an elite college at the time of the Notting Hill riots in 1976 and 1977, when second generation youngsters rebelled against arbitrary white police arrests of young blacks. Every year, during the August bank-holiday the Notting Hill Carnival is held in West London by Britain’s West Indian community, reminding them of the festivities held in the Caribbean. The unnecessary massive police presence offended the partying community, who feared that this white force would harass them once again, even at their own festival. During these years British people endured an identity crisis imposed by their declining global power which provoked the need of defining what being British meant. One of these aspects was the question whether to include ‘coloureds’ in this new definition or to stick to the racially constructed white notion of

⁹ The Atlantic Sound, published in 2000, is a work of non-fiction Phillips wrote based on a journey he made in order to resolve the question of what constitutes ‘home’. On his official website we read: “Phillips initially journeys from the Caribbean to Britain by banana boat, repeating a journey he made to England as a child in the late nineteen-fifties. He then visits three pivotal cities: Liverpool, developed on the back of the slave trade, which is now in denial about the true facts of its own history; Elmina, on the west coast of Ghana, site of the most important slave fort in Africa, and now a tourist destination for African-Americans; and Charleston in the American south, celebrated as the city where the Civil War began — not for being the city where fully one-third of African-Americans were landed and sold into bondage. Finally, Phillips journeys to Israel where he encounters a community of two thousand African-Americans, whose thirty-year sojourn in the Negev desert leaves him once again contemplating the modern condition of diasporan displacement”.


nationality. In *A New World Order* Phillips explains the growing frustration that ignited the resistance of these black youngsters as a specific second generational response to the contemporary national question:

My parents, and other West Indian migrants, persevered in the face of much hostility and prejudice, particularly over housing, and employment. By the 1970s their children’s generation, my generation, was still being subjected to the same prejudices which had blighted their arrival, but we were not our parents. You might say we lacked their good manners and the ability to turn the other cheek. Whereas they could sustain themselves with the dream of one day ‘going home’, we were already at home. We had nowhere else to go and we needed to tell British society this (242).

Although Phillips did not physically participate in the riots, since he was already at college by then, he was certainly aware of the existing mentality and he vividly remembers the fear of the police growing up as a teenager during the years after David Oluwale was murdered by police officers.¹⁰

At college, Phillips’ profound wish was to understand the human being. He therefore chose to study psychology at Oxford, before he graduated in English Language and Literature. This change of studies happened after a tutor advised him a reconsideration of his choice by uttering “that William James was the first professor of psychology at Harvard, but it was his brother, Henry, who really knew about people” (“GP” F22). This is not a surprising reconsideration, as the article “Growing Pains” poignantly describes how much reading meant to Phillips throughout his youth, once “[h]e learn[ed] how to lose himself in the world and lives of others, and [how] in this way he [did] not have to think about the woeful state of his

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¹⁰ The reality of David Oluwale’s death is conveyed in Phillips’ cross-generic piece *Foreigners* (2007), sometimes subtitled *Three English Lives*, narrating the lives of three black British citizens. David Oluwale is one of them. He was murdered in Leeds by the police force after living there for twenty years, once having migrated from Nigeria in order to get a degree, but in reality living a life on the streets. His death was a severe wake up call considering the attitude of English justice, especially towards non-white citizens.
own life” (F22). Although he already wrote stories at a young age, it was only after a trip to the United States at the age of twenty and after reading Richard Wright's Native Son that he “knows what he wishes to do with his life. And then, some time later, he is grateful to discover that mere ambition is fading and is being replaced by something infinitely more powerful: purpose” (“GP” F22). He decided to be a writer.

3.2 Caryl Phillips as a Writer: More than a Dual Ambiguity

After this decision Phillips faced the challenge of figuring out what kind of writer he would want to become. He had read other writers who were regarded as outsiders and were dealing with a split identity: James Baldwin, J.M. Coetzee, Frantz Fanon, Ignatius Sancho, and even Anne Frank (NWO 5). He realised that there are others “who have been dealt the same ambiguous hand” of cultural inheritance that raises the question “Who am I?” (NWO 4). Still, the novels he read most often were written by African-American authors. According to Phillips they “best reflected the black and white divide that […] characterised Britain at that time” (NWO 129). The Caribbean novels, on the other hand, “seemed foreign, exotic even, and so [he] spent little time with them” (NWO 129). Since he describes his life as one lived continuously “along the twin rails of reading and writing[, t]he one informing the other”, he had to discover the taste of his parents’ home country sooner or later (NWO 4). It was Frantz Fanon, the French-Algerian psychiatrist who opened this imaginative Caribbean world up to him, once Phillips discovered Fanon was actually born in Martinique. In his creative mind and through that of other authors, he had been “travelling furiously across borders and boundaries” for quite some time now (NWO 5). However, it was crossing a physical border that made him discover that he wanted to be a writer. Likewise his search to define himself as a particular writer developed simultaneously with several journeys he made after graduating, since “it had long been clear to [him] that the full complexity of who [he is] – [his] plural self,
if you like – was never going to be nourished in a country that seemed to revel in its ability to reduce identity to easily repeatable clichés” (“NJ” F4).

Two years after his trip to the United States, he went back to St. Kitts for the first time since his parents had left. It was after meeting his supposedly dead grandfather that he finally understood “that the cultural hybridity that is the quintessential Caribbean condition had certainly marked [his] person, and the quality of the blood that flowed through [his] veins was doggedly ‘impure’” (NWO 130). Suddenly there was more at stake than a British division between black and white. The same feeling was confirmed after his first trip around Europe in 1984. He had this urge to grow as a person and a writer and in order to do so he had to keep crossing borders. Twenty years later he evaluated this physical and mental journey as follows:

I felt as though I was striving to do two things simultaneously. First, I was trying to become a writer. Second, I was still engaged in a struggle to recognise and protect my own identity, in all its intricacy, for I knew that I had to view it as unique, complicated, open to inspection and re-examination, and binding me not just to a particular tribe, clan, or race, but to the human race. I always understood that recognising this would be a prerequisite of writing well, for the more vigorously one resists a narrow view of self, the more one sees. In many ways, the task of trying to recognise and protect my identity was just as exhausting as the task of trying to become a writer. (“NJ” F4).

Phillips’ early work, mostly plays, stumbled upon divided opinions. While some thought it to be too radical, others claimed that it was not radical enough. In A New World Order Phillips expresses his dissatisfaction about how critics valued his early work only by comparison with so-called white work (243). Equally, he laments that a writer such as Ignatius Sancho had to “bow ‘excessively’ before one’s literary and social superiors” (250).
This is a shocking parallel, taking into account that Sancho wrote two centuries before Phillips, who nonetheless still had to abide by the same white Western laws dominating British culture. In the same way as there is more to his identity than the opposition between black and white, there had to be more to his writing as well. There were British writers such as Sir Walter Raleigh and Robert Louis Stevenson writing about belonging and British identity. The African diaspora was covered by, for example, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin. His Caribbean ancestry found his way in novels by famous writers such as Jean Rhys and V.S. Naipaul. Phillips consciously chose not to pick only one of the ethnicities composing his hybrid identity to write about, since choosing would mean to put severe restrictions upon himself, both as a person and as a writer. Moreover, “[g]iven the type of writer [he] was trying to become, [he] knew that such a course of action would not serve [him] well”, since he was still fundamentally interested in understanding the human soul (“NJ” F4).

A closer look at his novels confirms that Phillips consciously tries to avoid restrictions in addressing a wide range of subjects related to the question of belonging and ancestry. Both The Final Passage (1985) and A State of Independence (1986) deal with migration both from and to the Caribbean and Britain. Afterwards, he wrote three novels deliberating the African slave trade, from both the English and the African perspectives: Higher Ground (1989), Cambridge (1991) and Crossing the River (1993). Jewish identity during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the Holocaust, and contemporary Israel, are portrayed in The Nature of Blood (1997). A Distant Shore (2003) is the first novel set in contemporary Britain, questioning how society responds, or rather fails to give a response, to the continuing multiculturalisation of the nation. Dancing in the Dark (2005), again a journey to the past, narrates the life of the black American entertainer Bert Williams. In the Falling Snow (2009) tells the story of an English born black man torn between his first generation West Indian
father and his third generation ‘halfie’ son growing up along the Thames in contemporary London. In the Falling Snow is a first attempt to explicitly narrate a second generation story and the friction this situation causes between migrant parent and autochthonous child, while at the same time including the friction with the contemporary third generation embodied in the protagonist’s son as well.

After his first successes, Phillips moved to the United States in the early nineties, where he finally feels enabled to “exercise some authority over [his] own identity” (SBS). He describes New York as a place “in which thirty-six percent of the city was not even born in the United States of America, let alone New York City” (SBS). Moreover he assigns the international attraction of the city to the fact that it serves as a sort of place of creative refugee where race and ethnicity will not limit an artist, since “[a]s soon as the creative mind is infested with race, then the creative mind is no longer creative” (NWO 15). While this has been a reason for many African-Americans to flee America in a period when they could only be conversational supplicants instead of authors, it is the same reason that has drawn Phillips to this city that seems to move beyond race. Thus, the USA now adds a fourth clear denominator to the three other constituents of Phillips’ plural identity, all of which are present in one or more of his novels. He is shaped, not by one, but by many stories, as he tries to explain in A New World Order, talking about himself in the third person:

[T]his boy has had to understand the Africa of his ancestry, the Caribbean of his birth, the Britain of his upbringing, and the United States, where he now resides, as one harmonious entity. He has tried to write in the face of a late-twentieth-century world that has sought to reduce identity to unpalatable clichés of nationality or race. He has learnt to accept his transgressive nature. But he knows that the world is changing (6).

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11 The son is described in the novel as a ‘halfie’ by some bullies since his father is black and his mother is white.
Although these four denominators do not seem to compose “a harmonious entity” in a superficial summary of his novels, Phillips tries to reconcile them in his writing as well, while keeping in mind the increasingly globalizing contemporary world in which “we are all being dealt an ambiguous hand” (NWO 6). Although it might be dangerous to interlink a writer’s life and his work too much, in Phillips’ case it is undeniable that the two are inextricably intertwined. Especially since Phillips carries a profound wish within him to voice his personal experiences, and writing is in part inherently political for him (SBS). It is therefore indispensable to mention that, besides a novelist, Phillips is also a prolific non-fiction writer. However, “[u]nlike his creative writing, where he always stays clear of anger”, he does not fear to voice strong personal opinions in his essays (Ledent, “MA” 2). Therefore “it is also important to read his fiction with his own essays in mind for they tackle similar themes, though in a less oblique manner” (Ledent “MA” 5). This method proves to be successful sometimes in my own reading of Phillips as well, although it is not infallible. It might unjustly overlook the artistic qualities of Phillips’ work and the nuanced subtleties he so skillfully conveys through his fiction, while at the same time it might impose a certain interpretation of the work on your own reading, only providing you with the obvious cues and discounting the less evident ones which need to be read between the lines.

3.3 Phillips’ Fiction as An Encounter with His Own Experience

Phillips’ personal affiliations with Africa, the Caribbean, Great Britain and the United States offer him a complex quadruple notion of belonging and a personal identity composed of several varying denominators. Since people defined by a plural cultural inheritance are an increasing reality this opens up the question of what defines nationality. Moreover, this question also moves beyond the particularity of second generational experiences, although these experiences equally influence Phillips greatly. Phillips’ life and journeys have taught
him that many societies are rather composed of a cultural plurality than a uniform nationality. This reality calls for a revision of this racially constructed notion towards an understanding of the multiplicity of both human beings and society. Each identity is composed of varying denominators, more important than race only. Some of these denominators, such as gender, complexion and ancestry, we fail to control. Other experiences that people choose to undergo, such as travelling, marriage, children, etc. are more conscious choices. But mostly people are shaped by contingencies, which will provide memories and a personal growth, constituting a nuanced unique identity. Although the aspect of race and roots might be one of the most visible, Phillips does not believe it is the most important one. In an interview with Nathaniel Turner, Phillips said “[he is] more concerned with ‘identity’ than with ‘race.’ The latter is just one component in the former, along with religion, gender, nationality, class, etc.”. Here he mentions the plurality that Tournay-Theodotou assigns to “England as a society in flux”, a multicultural change “that contemporary societies are currently undergoing” and that provokes “the destabilization of the experience of home” (n. pag.). Society is equally composed of these complex identities creating a cultural plurality that goes further than only race as well. Unfortunately, people and societies are not eager to revise their carefully instituted notions and persevere with categorizing people into prejudiced roles by pinning them down with restrictive labels.

In his fiction Phillips tries to undermine the imaginative limits we assign to people’s identity. Distinctions between race, gender, age, etc. blur and he puts everyone in the same position of a plural identity. Tournay-Theodotou explains that “Caryl Phillips seems to have deliberately constructed a palette of characters that are not English but different in their own ways in order to show how a similarly marginalised position in society promotes a deeper understanding and sympathy for the plight of another stranger” (7). Reading about these characters, about a narrative, in a form that expresses the multiple facets of a cultural plurality
may appear to be even more effective in order to digest Phillips’ ideas on contemporary societies than his non-fictional work. I do agree with Ledent that they should be read as complementary, but while his essays may inspire you to rethink certain issues, his fiction may help you to truly understand and empathise with the complexity of things through identification with certain characters and a submersion in the story. Through creating “a democratization of discourse in which no participant(s) will be able to claim dominance”, through both form and content, Phillips portrays his firm belief in a society of cultural plurality rather than explicitly lecturing about it (Farrier 2). He lets his readers experience and sympathise with this nuanced multiplicity for themselves, in order to open up their minds to the reality of a cultural plurality surrounding them in their own society. The question of belonging in a society is not just about “the difficulties of dwelling in a country in which being black disqualifies one from national belonging and identity” (McLeod 10). Phillips opens these difficulties up beyond race and skin colour, by showing how non-blacks can feel equally displaced and like ‘strangers’ because elements such as age, gender, or class prevent them from being fully integrated in society, such as the rapidly ageing and somewhat estranged Dorothy in *A Distant Shore* (2003). Phillips once “[s]aid that whether we liked it or not we were all becoming multicultural individuals. This was not only inevitable, it was also highly desirable” (“The Silenced Minority” F34). In a way we have all become strangers, or even immigrants. Phillips’ response of cultural plurality is not easily accepted in Britain, a nation in the habit of racially constructing their notion of nationality. “Race and ethnicity are the bricks and mortar with which the British have traditionally built a wall around the perimeter of their island nation and created fixity” (NWQ 272). Across the centuries the presence of blacks has created a firm confrontation with the nation’s conception that one needs to be white in order to belong.
Although Phillips does not specifically criticise the white population for discriminating against the coloured population in his novels, he does not give them a voice either. Admittedly, he offers the solution of looking at each individual’s characteristics and circumstances, which provides a diversity that denotes much more than just race, since “[t]hese days we are all unmoored” (NWO 6). Nonetheless, he does not move beyond people in a victimised position. The English ladies Dorothy in A Distant Shore (2003) and Emily in Cambridge (1991) are equally marooned because of their age and gender, though neither of them is completely innocent either. White voices in The Nature of Blood (1997) are victimised by their Jewishness. In A Distant Shore (2003) he does not offer a voice to the white bullies who murder Solomon, nor to the police officer responsible for David Oluwale’s death in Foreigners (2007). If Phillips truly wants us to sympathise with each individual, constituted by the variable denominators life presented them, this should not be an exclusive method, but an inclusive one. James Baldwin, writing about the white murderer of Emmett Till, a negro youth from Mississippi, admits that “[i]n life, obviously, such people baffle and terrify” him, while he is also “aware that no man is a villain in his own eyes” (6). As a writer Baldwin consequently assigns himself the task that “if it is true, and [he believes] it is, that all men are brothers, then we have the duty to try to understand this wretched man; and while we probably cannot hope to liberate him, begin working toward the liberation of his children” (6).

As cultural anthropologist Pinxten explains, “throughout the course of the lifetime of each

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12 In Crossing the River (1994) a captain’s slave ship journal is included in the chapter equally named Crossing the River. Even though James Hamilton might appear to be an exception, since he is a white man voicing some of his feelings such as his nostalgia towards his wife, no attempt is made to understand why a man would indulge in such horrid practices as the slave trade. It is only faintly suggested it might be for money since he comforts his love with the thought that his business is for her own sake or because his father exercised the same profession (109, 119). Moreover, it is not explored whether Hamilton is suffering from having doubts based on ethical questions or a pained moral or not. The only reasons provided for his unhappiness are his nostalgia for his wife and the hardships he encounters with his crew (108, 118).

13 However, very formal snippets of the murderer’s testimony alongside more emotional confessions of the murderer’s colleague who disapproved his superior’s abusive behaviour are included in the novel. As was the case in Crossing the River (1994), it almost touches upon a white voice who could explain how come he mistreats black people, but in the end no real investigation of their motives of acting as such, or non-acting, in the case of the murderer’s inferior colleague, is made.
individual we discern the appearance of shifts, adaptations and conflict situations. The individual searches for solutions according to the educational tools and habits he is familiar with. […] Every cultural identity is variable and possesses its own history of change and conflict. The same is true for groups and societies” (27).14 Phillips subscribes to this notion in his complex characters and in writing about how “England has changed”, in for example A Distant Shore (2003) and A New World Order (2001) (ADS 3). Simultaneously, Phillips laments how society still fails to transgress the racial boundaries of nationality and how racial abuse is still a consistent feature in society. If he wants abusers to understand and sympathise with the ‘others’ he invents in every single one of his novels, where does his own effort lie to understand them? If he wants them to look beyond ‘otherness’, he should equally try to look beyond their ‘abusiveness’. Especially since his response to this abusive society is to open the issue up beyond race and ethnicity. By doing so he wants to show that when we label people with either which name or restrictive etiquette, this will appear to be inadequate to grasp an identity that is too complex to encapsulate in one such term, as I have also analysed in detail in relation to A Distant Shore (2003) (Vyncke 2009). In “Necessary Journeys”, for example, Phillips also clearly states that

[t]he most dangerous thing that we can do to ourselves is to carelessly accept a label that is offered to us by a not always generous society that seeks to reduce us to little more than one single component of our rich and complex selves” (F4).

In The South Bank Show he relates the inadequacy and endless reductiveness of such labels to his role as a writer as well. He acknowledges how difficult it is not to take these labels into account, explaining why he moved to New York City: “In New York there is a freedom which enables one to slip the noose of what is often, at certain times of a writer’s

14 My own translation.
life, a crushing pressure to be something or to respond to something which actually does not reflect who you are, it is imposed upon you. [...] I always felt in [the UK], and I felt increasingly so towards the end of the Thatcher years, that I was being viewed as something that is less than what I actually am. [...] If I wanted to continue to be called up by every national newspaper or the BBC every time a black man threw a bottle on the street, then I should have stayed here, but I did not, because that is not artistic growth, that is just commentary”. However, Phillips himself is the one who keeps hammering on his continual displacement because he is a Northerner in England, a Caribbean immigrant, a descendant from the slave trade and now a resident of New York. The biographical picture Phillips portrays seems extremely polished and repetitive. The information he reveals is carefully selected and constitutes an image parallel with his own idealist beliefs and novels. Besides imposing his own background on his writing it seems as if he uses this “ambiguous hand of cards” which establishes the geographical scene of his writings as a definition of his own image as a writer and as a person as well (introduction NWO). Ironically, this way he does not seem to practise what he preaches in his own novels. I strongly agree with Ledent in her belief that “the essential cohesion of Phillips’s vision is best embodied in his fictional characters. As his books are neither plot-, nor idea-driven, but rely on an empathetic and tactful exploration of individual souls, it is not surprising that one should find in these the ultimate key to the meaning of his art” (“MA” 6). His characters have shown that he correctly sees individuals as persons with a fluid identity, keeping Pinxten’s definition of an individual and society in mind. In line with Pinxten’s definition, it is also undeniable that Phillips’ plural background and his search for a ‘home’ constitute a large part of his identity. However, just as there is more to his characters than only race and ethnicity, there has to be more to Phillips than this quadruple formed notion of home and identity as well. One could argue a writer is not obliged to expose himself in the media, but Phillips consciously emphasises these carefully selected
biographical elements, thus creating a myth around his own personal self – a myth, which in
my opinion conflicts with the rich plurality he advocates in his novels and essays, even
though he questions the monolithical definition of a geographical ‘home’.
4. In the Falling Snow as a Second Generation Novel

Phillips’ latest novel In the Falling Snow (2009) might therefore be a first attempt to lay bare some of the peculiarities characteristic of second generation inhabitants of the UK and finally move beyond the geographical and historical determining threads Phillips has cherished so eagerly. Even though the subject of a second generation middle-aged man living in London seems to bear a close resemblance to Phillips’ own life, it would be too blunt to draw direct parallels between Keith, the novel’s protagonist, and himself, solely based on their common second generation postcoloniality. Although Phillips does not feel as if he imposes his own voice on his characters, he admits that a first person narrative may lure you down to using them simply as a cipher to express your own opinions (SBS). Even the highly autobiographical article “Growing Pains” is written in the third person, exactly because Phillips has difficulty with the question where to put the pronoun ‘me’ (Phillips “On writing Fiction.”). Instead of considering Phillips’ own background and that of his generation, I will depart from the novel itself and the passages I deemed meaningful. In order to offer a sufficient context for thematised interpretations of this selection of passages, I will provide a summary before moving on to a more in depth reading of the novel. First, I will focus on the representation of the different generations, their differences and similarities. Though clues for a profound interpretation are already provided through this subject, my argument will become even more patent and will receive somewhat more foundation through the themed analysis of communication and appearances I will provide secondly. Besides the peculiarities about the second generation some recurrent elements in Phillip’s work will equally become apparent. This in depth analysis of the novel, and more specifically the protagonist, will finally form the main basis for a comparison of In the Falling Snow (2009) and Phillips’ earlier work, primarily his first novel The Final Passage (1985). This comparison will serve to answer the
question whether this long-awaited move beyond his historical and geographical affiliation towards the more contemporary subject of the second generation should be regarded as a clear-cut break from his former work and the autobiographical myth he has so carefully built around himself, or rather as a logical consecutive piece in his chain of second generation literary work.

4.1 In the Falling Snow: The Story of Second Generation Keith

In the first chapter we are introduced to the status quo of Keith Gordon’s life: forty-seven years old, three years divorced, father of a seventeen-year-old son. Being recently promoted after the merging of his Race Equality Unit with Disability and Women’s Affairs he works long days, after which he comes home to a cold single-bedroom flat. To keep himself sexually satisfied he starts a relationship with a colleague named Yvette. The chapter opens with him breaking off their relationship and ends with Yvette sending their email conversations to everybody at the office, which forces Keith to take some time off from work. In the meantime we derive snippets of information about his contemporary relation with his wife and son and how his life arrived at this point. Keith met his former wife Annabelle while studying at Bristol University. However, since Keith was black and Annabelle white, “[t]hey both realised that it wasn’t going to be possible to go forward with their lives until the situation with Annabelle’s parents had been confronted” (43). After the arranged post-graduation dinner and her father’s racist behaviour, Annabelle “had been both courageous and unambiguous about where her loyalties lay” (17), and she chose resolutely for Keith. Currently, Annabelle has been calling Keith several times about their son “and the problems he is experiencing at school, having fallen in with what she likes to call, ‘the wrong set’” (7). Even tough Keith avoids any contact with Annabelle because he dislikes her new boyfriend, and “Laurie seems somewhat indifferent to the idea of spending any time with his father” (7),
both Annabelle and Laurie occur repetitiously in Keith’s train of thoughts. Keith still wonders why he cheated on Annabelle and even more so, why he confessed. Black or white, in the end Keith is a common middle-aged man suffering from a clichéd midlife-crisis and the endless routine he finds himself caught in.

In chapter two, by taking some time off from work, Keith tries to focus on the book about music that he has been meaning to write for years. In order to find some inspiration in a new environment he goes to the local library. Two days in a row, a girl comes in and starts reading an English newspaper using a Polish dictionary. Keith, who thinks “[h]er face is strangely angelic” (67) invites her out for a drink. When the Polish girl dislikes the pub Keith chose they end up in his apartment. All this time she “behaves as though she has never suffered a single moment of self-doubt” (73), but when Keith tries to kiss her, she quickly departs to work. Nonetheless, Danuta made Keith remember his childhood years with Brenda. At the age of six, after his mother’s death, Keith’s stepfather took him to live with his real father and Brenda. Unfortunately, “there always seemed to be arguments between his father and Brenda” up until the point that his father started “stripping off his shirt and shouting at nobody at particular” (85). His father became institutionalised in a mental hospital and Brenda, although white, took care of Keith as her own son. On his thirteenth birthday his father was let out of the hospital and he came back to fetch his son. Although Keith tries to focus on his book, he has to admit that Danuta has become a sort of obsession for him. After stupidly trying to track her down and even spying on her at work Keith finally realises “that his becoming obsession is over” (105) and he should rather focus on Annabelle and Laurie instead. Apparently, Laurie’s headmaster assumes Laurie is in a gang and notices he only wants to hang out with black youngsters. Keith and Annabelle try to discuss the situation afterwards in a wine bar. Keith sympathises with Laurie, who “is one of the few black kids in his class”, and consequently blames the white teachers (111). Back at his flat, Annabelle has
been trying to reach him on his cell phone. Keith calls her back only to find out she is looking for Laurie who was not at home when she came back. She finds him at a skateboard park together with some friends. Keith, who witnesses this on the phone, finally concludes that their son is “totally out of order” (120). This eventful call is a premonition of what he should concentrate on instead of spending his time with younger girls. He needs to hold on to what is left of their relationship and try to salvage it by fostering their insufficient communication.

The third chapter is devoted to Keith’s first attempts at reconnecting with his family and his resolution of trying not to jeopardise himself any longer by hanging around with younger girls. As Keith promised Annabelle, he spends some time with Laurie. He even proposes Laurie to travel to the Caribbean with him during the summer. On their return, Annabelle is despondent about the blog in which people discuss Keith and Yvette’s situation. Keith trusts his boss to deal with the situation, while actually his boss implies that he believes Yvette’s wrongful accusations. Afterwards, Keith unexpectedly finds Danuta standing at his door. She seems to be distressed about something that happened between herself and her roommate, Rolf. Although she does not provide sufficient information, she asks Keith if “[p]erhaps it is possible to stay here for a few days” (140). After she has rested somewhat in his bed, Keith realises it is impossible for her to stay at his place. The next morning Keith feels relieved she has gone, especially when Lesley, his boss’ deputy, wants to meet him urgently. Lesley appears to be the co-worker he slept with on the one occasion he committed adultery. Even though he treated her badly after this one time encounter, she offers Keith an unexpected ally in his current work situation. She confides his boss’ plans and advises him to simply resign. In the evening Laurie fails to show up for their appointment to watch a soccer game and Keith fails to reach either Annabelle or Laurie himself. Apparently, Laurie got into a fight and Keith takes him out to the South Bank of London to talk. Unwilling to push Laurie he does not learn much about this brawl in which his son was involved. Instead he chooses to
show him London, a place he should feel to belong. However, Keith quickly realises “that there is no reason for him to acquaint Laurie with what he already possesses […], the city of his birth” (163). Thus Keith revises his strategy and starts talking to Laurie about the hardships of growing up black in a mainly white-oriented society. Maybe Annabelle was right after all saying that she “might be losing him around the black-white thing” (118). Besides, Keith has made a decision: “He should have done this before, instead of hanging about London and becoming frustrated with the book, and then almost getting into trouble with Danuta. A break will do him good” (170). He visits his father for the first time in several years and is appalled at the state in which he finds his father and his place. His father does not particularly welcome him with open arms either. Although Keith blames his father for not wanting to talk with him about Brenda, initially Keith equally refuses to talk to his father about his current situation caused by Yvette. At the Nelson Mandela Centre, a supported accommodation home where his father’s friends reside, his father seems to be a completely different man; happy and entertaining. It is from Baron, the friend Keith feels most attached to himself, that he understands that his father actually thinks highly of him, although he finds this hard to believe. Moreover, Baron reveals somewhat more about the disappointing predicament in which he and Keith’s father, “[t]he sons of Empire”, find themselves (196). At night Annabelle calls Keith and asks him to come back to London as soon as possible. Laurie has been arrested after somebody got stabbed. Keith immediately leaves his father and takes a bus to London. At the police station he finds a distressed Annabelle and he takes her out to have some coffee and discuss what has happened. Both the lawyer and Laurie’s arrested friends ensured the police that Laurie was only a bystander and did not commit any crime himself. Annabelle wonders if it might be necessary for Laurie to live with Keith for some time. Therefore, slowly, Keith begins to appear in the family picture again.
Chapter four opens with the unmasking of Danuta. Keith finds a bewildered Rolf on his doorstep, since Rolf is convinced he will find Danuta at Keith’s place. Apparently, Danuta has robbed him and he thought he could find her with her possible next victim. It appears she has a husband and three children and only used Keith, all the time ridiculing him at the language school for his silliness. Obviously, Keith is relieved he made the right decision of not letting her stay at his flat any longer. “He understood that narrowly escaping being ripped off by Danuta should be seen as a wake-up call, reminding him that he has to drastically change his behaviour, but he remains confused” (212). The first thing he has to handle is last’s night crime in which his son appeared to be somehow involved. Once Laurie is at home they talk about what has happened. Apparently two guys from school stabbed someone, after which they came across Laurie by accident and made him an accomplice by handing him the knife. Laurie was afraid to say no, in case they would stab him as well if he refused. In his turn, he left the knife with Chantelle, who eventually handed it over to the police. Laurie claims to be safe now, but he worries about these guys resenting Chantelle for entrusting the knife to the police. At their meeting with Laurie’s headmaster it is implied that they, the parents, are failing and the school is doing all they can. Annabelle and Keith are convinced otherwise, since they have never been really pleased with this school’s dedication to educational quality. In the middle of Anabelle’s and Keith’s discussion Keith receives a call from Baron about his father being ill. Although Baron tells him not to worry and that everything is under control Keith reads between the lines and understands that if Baron made an effort to call, there must be something seriously wrong. Before he leaves their remains just one more thing to handle: resigning from his job. He invites his boss to the pub, who continually assures Keith no one comprehends his work as well as he does. Still, Keith is adamant and sees through this polite but hypocritical scene his boss is playing. In the evening Lesley visits his flat uninvited to tell him Yvette is taking the case to a tribunal. Resigning
thus made him look guilty. While she is there, Lesley grabs the opportunity to discuss what once happened between them. Even though Keith does not utter this aloud, it becomes very evident for him that he has huge regrets. As a new cathartic wake-up call this forces him to realise that “[h]e no longer cared about the whole pantomime of his fancy job and the consequences of his so-called inappropriate behaviour” (252). What he does care about are the deep regrets he feels about being so stupid as to jeopardise his marriage as he did. Besides, he also cares about his son. Laurie called him to meet after Keith is back from his father. Finally, Keith seems to be resolute about changing the midlife-crisis-life in which he has found himself, including neglecting his parental duties ever since the divorce.

Chapter five focuses on Keith’s father who is hospitalised after a heart attack and finally starts confiding his life story to Keith. Since his father is deeply asleep when he arrives, Keith journeys to the Mandela Centre first to visit Baron, his father’s friend who checked him into the hospital. Baron was born in Jamaica and has been living in England for almost all his adult life. Baron starts telling Keith about the English experience of their generation. He hopes Keith will have mercy for his father knowing how hard his life has been. Once Keith arrives next to his father’s hospital bed, his father starts to talk incessantly. He confesses he wants to go home, not “to some stupid English house”, but to his West Indian island where he was born and raised (269). This way he embarks upon a long journey throughout his memory of how and why he arrived in England, the hardships that fell upon him and how he started playing the role of father since Keith was six years old and brought to his father’s and Brenda’s house. How Keith experienced his childhood years with his father and Brenda was already vaguely narrated to the reader by Keith. How his father arrived at this point, however, was still a mystery, both to the readers and Keith himself. After his father dies, however, Keith leaves in a rush to London, where he fails to tell about his father’s death to Annabelle. Though Laurie’s girlfriend Chantelle appears to be pregnant, the focus of the
final paragraphs lies not on this current problem. It describes rather how Annabelle notices something is wrong with Keith, even if he does not confide his father’s death to her, and she instinctively starts taking care of him, without Keith having even acknowledged he needs her reassurance. The novel ends with the open possibility whether or not Keith will spend the night at Annabelle’s. In terms of his current middle-aged predicament it ends with the question whether Keith will finally accept the current state of his life, grow up and continue living it, or he and Annabelle will finally start mending their relationship.

Already in a superficial reading of the story, though focussing on the second generation protagonist, some characteristics of Phillips’ work can be recognised. Once again, Bewes’ declaration that, “[r]ather than corrective narratives, telling a previously untold or mistold story about the past, Phillips’s works are caught up in a drama of literary possibility that is riveted to their contemporaneity” remains correct (35-36). The open-endedness of the novel serves the reader with as little information about which road will be taken in the future as was also the case with the end in The Final Passage (1985). The disruption of the family unit and their communicational problems, which will be dealt with later on, are recurrent themes as well. Problematic familial relationships have been dealt with in almost every previous novel. An absent or faulty father figure is to be found in The Final Passage (1985), Higher Ground (1989), Cambridge (1991), Crossing the River (1993), A Distant Shore (2003) and Dancing in the Dark (2005). Difficult maternal relationships or their absence, on the other hand, are to be found in The Final Passage (1985), A State of Independence (1986), Higher Ground (1989), Cambridge (1991), Crossing the River (1993) and Dancing in the Dark (2005). Significantly both lists overlap. When one of both parents is already absent, the one remaining often has a problematic relationship with their child, as is the case in almost all of these novels. An interracial relationship resulting in a ‘halfie’ son has been dealt with already in the final part of Crossing the River (1993), even though the son was given up for adoption.
In *In the Falling Snow* (2009), the central presence of an interracial marriage with a ‘halfie’ son illustrates once more the impossibility of regarding ‘Englishness’ as something exclusively white. This is also subtly highlighted by the carefully dispersed references throughout the novel to the presence of other ethnic minorities as well: either by their food and beverages that have become standard in British society or by mentioning them in the form of non-prominent characters.\(^\text{15}\) This means of exhibiting the cultural plurality of society has also been used in *A Distant Shore* (2003), but is actually present in the other novels as well.

By retracing the history of slavery and anti-Semitism in his novels, Phillips displays that, for example, black and Jewish people have been members of English society for quite some time already. Moreover, on two occasions in *In the Falling Snow* (2009) Phillips even questions the prominent place of the Anglo-Saxon roots in the UK’s history on which a lot of the UK’s contemporary identity is built, when he refers back to the Romans: once when he mentions the discovery of a “pre-Roman settlement” near Annabelle’s parents’ village and once when he refers to the UK as “terra firma” (*IFS* 26, 165). In other words, even in *In the Falling Snow* (2009) Phillips has created an imaginative environment in which the presence of many nationalities and ethnicities, not only in present day, but already in the distant past as well, challenge a one-sided exclusive view of ‘Englishness’. Moreover, through his main characters, on whom the authoritative voice fails to pass judgements, as in all his previous novels, the readers are encouraged to sympathise with the complexities of their feelings and

\(^{15}\) Some examples: “she was surprised to see that the driver was an Indian” (23), “Madras Bicycle Club which was Indian colonial in décor, but the cuisine was far more eclectic” (44), “the two Nigerian guys from the superstore [...] they were in a hurry because Arsenal were playing at home” (47), “the three waves of immigration to Britain during the past decade” (50), “maybe she would like to go for an Indian” (70), “We could order some food. Chinese. Indian. Whatever you like, they’ll deliver.” (74), “the minicab driver had a heavy West-African accent and he was wearing a lime green dashiki, which made his attempt to speak cockney come across as vaguely absurd” (103), “a Greek or French restaurant” (124), “Italian beer” (124), “I can order food for delivery. Well, Chinese or Indian.” (140), “the Chinese guy behind the till” (189), “kebab shop” (201), “if he doesn’t hurry up, the Pakis will have all the jobs” (222), “seeing white girls dressed as Arabs” (231), “German bomb was discovered near the Norman church” (232), “a one-legged Muslim who likes burgers” (243), “the West London Internet Call Centre, a place that seemed to specialise in calls to Somalia, Bangladesh, or Pakistan” (246), “Bangladeshis” (247), “But where does that leave the Cypriots?” (302), “the same Indian restaurant” (314), “Somali-run internet café” (326), “Mediterranean types” (326).
acts, which are denominated by so many different factors, such as for example their past experiences. Even though Keith assumes he knows that his father and Annabelle do not like him, through the novel the readers learn once more that every situation is plural and such a one-sided interpretation will always be reductive. By focalising the novel through Keith, we will sympathise mostly with this main character, thus raising our awareness and understanding of second generation migrants who we may encounter in our daily life, hopefully no longer regarding them as outsiders. Obviously, through this novel, the readers will understand that an inclusive approach to membership concerning our present day society is the only feasible one. Moreover, the characters he displays are not reducible to a simplified label. Keith represents not ‘the’ but ‘a’ possible story of a second generation character. Equally, Earl is only one example of a first generation migrant, Annabelle represents only one specific possibility of a white woman married to a black man and Laurie narrates the story of one single third generation teenager. Every human being, situation and society is constituted of a nuanced plurality and a one-sided view on either of these will always be restrictive. This message has been dealt with most overtly in A Distant Shore (2003), but can actually be retraced in every simple novel he has written before. After this superficial summary and reading of In the Falling Snow (2009) I will move on to an in depth analysis of the theme of generations. At first sight the treatment of generational interaction may appear to be the main difference with previous novels. Later on, in comparison with The Final Passage (1985 & 1996), it will become clear that Phillips has always been very conscious of the link that exists between the generations. Even though the second generation was not dealt with in a straightforward manner before, In the Falling Snow (2009) is actually a logical result of a long-existing concern by Phillips.
4.2 Generational Peculiarities Versus Similarities

Since *In the Falling Snow* (2009) has hardly been dealt with in academic circles, I feel entitled to provide an in depth analysis of the novel, even if the relation with the previous novels, which I try to argue, will become clear only later on in comparison with other work. As mentioned before, this novel is the first one in which Phillips portrays a grown-up second generation immigrant, interacting with both the older and the younger generations. It therefore seems evident that this novel confronts the generation gaps between them, which constitutes the main difference between this novel and the previous ones. Besides the presence of the theme in Keith’s relationship with his father and son, other fragments refer to the importance of generational differences as well. Blatant references can be found in Keith’s idea to include a chapter about families and generations in his book on music (142) and his almost obsessive concern with the differences between younger and older women. However, more subtle references can be found as well. Annabelle, for example, is very conscious about educating Laurie according to her conviction that “children ought to spend time with both of their parents, particularly if the child is without siblings” (230-231). This concern results from her own experiences of “seaside holidays spent with her mother while her father was away on duty in Ireland, or inspecting troops in Germany, or in some long-forgotten outpost of what remained of the empire, such as Gibraltar” (231). Two interesting points about generations are made here. Firstly, it is a common reflex for parents to pledge to alter their parents’ habits which made them feel miserable when they were still children themselves. Evidently, it is unsure whether Annabelle actually succeeds in this objective, since Laurie has spent hardly any time with his father since the divorce. Moreover, in spite of her willingness to change certain aspects of her own education, Keith “realised the degree to which his wife was slowly, despite her youthful looks, becoming her mother” (50). Besides the parents, grandparents normally take part in the education of their grandchildren to a certain degree as well, in this
way ‘skipping’ a generation in between. Though Laurie has hardly any contact with his
grandparents, Keith did criticise Annabelle’s mother once for teaching Laurie “middle-class-
writing” (68). Secondly, in Annabelle’s seaside memory the empire is mentioned. While her
father was involved with colonisation as a military, she herself married a second generation
Briton of West Indian descent, which results in her father having a ‘halfie’ grandson. Though
her father’s military past in colonisation does not directly influence Annabelle’s life,
indirectly he helped to make colonisation, and thus Keith’s presence in the UK, possible.
Consequently, Annabelle’s father is in part ‘guilty’ for having someone of mixed decent in his
family two generations later. In other words, both interpretations point out that while the first
generation influences how the second generation handles the third generation, the first
generation certainly has some direct or indirect influence on the third generation as well.
However, on the surface the novel would give you the impression that the contrary is true,
since the generations seem to be living significantly separated from one another.

Moreover, the failure or lack of communication is another recurrent theme in the
novel, thus it seems at first as if mainly the differences and the ignorance between the
generations are highlighted. For example, when Keith takes the train, “[t]hree teenagers sit
opposite him […]. He can see that, like his son Laurie, all three kids are partly white, but it is
clear from their baggy dress sense, and from the way that they slouch and speak, that they
identify themselves as black” (14). Keith fails to understand their “sense of entitlement”
which he describes as “palpably absurd” (31). Moreover, he is grateful that his own son does
not equally feel that he is an “achiever”, who “[deserves] nothing less than what they call
‘maximum respect’” (31). However, when Keith takes Laurie to the South Bank his son starts
talking exactly like these kids: “‘The thing is, Dad, I don’t know if things are the same now as
they where when you were my age. […] It’s got a lot to do with respect. You can’t let people
just large it up in your face and disrespect you. A man’s got to have respect or he’s nothing
better than somebody’s punk’” (167). Keith strongly disagrees and “what [Laurie’s] exasperated father is trying to say to him boils down to one sentence he knows he can’t say. ‘Laurie, act your age, not your colour’” (168). Moreover, “[both] he and Laurie are trying hard not to cause each other any upset, but after three years of living apart it is evident to [Keith] that they are woefully incapable of conversing casually” (168). While Laurie is busy “styling” (109) and exploring “the cultural cachet of the ethnic way of life” (236), as his headmaster likes to describe it, Keith is more concerned about working twice as hard and proving what he is worth to this English society. After graduating at Bristol University, Keith made quite an impressive career in social work. He has an exquisite taste for wine, married a white intelligent woman and owns a vast collection of music. Despite growing up in a working-class area and family, Keith has managed to raise himself to the middle-class, which his father conversely never managed to achieve. At second sight, however, there will appear to be more similarities between these three generations and intergenerational influences than a superficial reading of the storyline suggests.

Admittedly, the differences between the generations need to be pointed out as well, since they make up the peculiarities of being first, second or even third generation. In this view, Keith is obviously a second generation protagonist. On the one hand he was born from first generation parents, who migrated to the UK and had to suffer through vexing condition, once arrived there, which influences the environment their second generation children grew up in. On the other hand, Keith was born on British soil and has an “identitarian relationship” with this society that will grant him the possibilities to move beyond this irksome environment (McLeod 9). In other words, the fact that Keith was born in the UK makes him already immensely different from his parents. “Whereas they could sustain themselves with the dream of one day ‘going home’, [his generation was] already at home. [They] had nowhere else to go and [they] needed to tell British society this” (NWO 242). Keith chose a
non-violent way to try to convey this message to society and “because he believed that he might be able to help people understand one another, he had put aside all thoughts of a Ph.D. and had recently started to apply for social work” (45). It was the violent sort of response, “[t]he urban insurrections, or riots as the media liked to call them, which punctuated his days as a student, [that] convinced him that staying on and doing graduate work would almost certainly prove to be a frustrating waste of time” (41). Rather, he wanted to contribute to “[h]is generation of kids, who were born in Britain and who had no memory of any kind of tropical life before England, [and who] were clearly trying hard to make a space for themselves in a not always welcoming country (41). This was once more confirmed when he met Annabelle’s parents for the first time and he failed to explain to Annabelle’s father “the frustrations of his generation” (44). As a response “the man laughed in his face” and suddenly Keith understood “why local authorities up and down the country had started advertising for race relation liaison officers, people who could help explain black anger to white people, and white liberal do-gooding to disgruntled black people” (44-45). In other words, his degree combined with his skin colour even favoured him for these kind of jobs in social work, which left him at the end of his studies with a considerable choice of vacancies (46). Besides, no overt problems are told about finding housing together with Annabelle or after his divorce. As long as he had the money to pay the rent everything was fine, unlike “[his] parents, and other West Indian migrants, [who] persevered in the face of much hostility and prejudice, particularly over housing, and employment” (NWO 242). The most apparent hardship he had to suffer because of his skin colour as an adult was dealing with Annabelle’s parents and her small-minded home village who disapproved of their interracial relationship. As Ledent rightfully points out:

[A]t the time the narrative starts he has lived separated from his white wife Annabelle for three years, […] his teenage son, Laurie, seems to have become unmanageable and
the end of his affair with a young colleague is threatening to take a legal turn. These problems, however, are linked to middle-age, not to his origins ("DA" n.pag.).

His childhood, on the other hand, still greatly inscribed to his parents’ first generation condition, tells a whole other story of suffering from the painful consequences the continual prejudices caused his parents. His mother, his stepfather and himself were living together “one on top of the other, in a small room that was always cold because the fumes from the paraffin heater made him sick” (219). “As a result, the unshaven man never took off his heavy cardigan or his trousers” (219), nonetheless he always came home from work with his “eyes and nose running” (220). Living in these harrowing circumstances his mother, who hardly left her bed in the attic room, “used to talk incessantly about a man called Mr Littlewoods who she hoped would send them back home” (220). It was only when he was an adult that Keith understood how slim the chance was she would ever go home, since Mr Littlewoods is not a man but the pools coupon. However, his mother dies from illness when Keith is only six years old. By then he has already “learned that he had other names besides Keith, most commonly ‘chocolate drop’” and that his stepfather stopped talking about “living like English people” once “he discovered dogshit smeared all over the bottles of milk on the doorstep” (220). After his mother’s death Keith was taken to his father and his white girlfriend, Brenda.

Although his life considerably improved living with only one West Indian migrant and at least one British citizen now, it was not a fairytale. He had lost his mother and he felt unwelcomed by his father. Even after Brenda explained to him that “England had hurt his head” and that Keith should not take it personally that “[h]e prefers books to people” he failed to feel any connection to his father, not knowing “what [he] should say to this man who seemed to be ignoring him?” (222). It was Brenda who won him over by convincing him with her promise to take care of him and not seeming to mind that people stared at them when they were sitting together in the park (180). She taught him words like “mild” (221) and that “she
won’t have name-calling, and neither should he” (222). Brenda was resolute that Keith should behave well and

[a]fter his father was readmitted to the hospital, and it was just the two of them alone, she drilled him in the importance of always saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, and if his tie wasn’t straight, and his socks pulled up all the way, and his shoes properly polished, he wasn’t allowed to leave the house (16).

Ironically, even now that he seems to have succeeded in life, Annabelle’s comment on Keith’s affair with his colleague being publicly displayed (113-114) echoes Brenda’s vision on how English people love to see coloureds fail and thus Keith should do everything in his might to avoid this. Brenda’s lesson is what shaped Keith’s almost entire life and attitude:

‘There’s people out there, Keith, who think they’re better than you, but never mind what they say, they’re not. However, I’m not giving them some reason to think they are. Keep your chin up, love, your clothes nice and tidy, and your language decent, and you’ll be a credit to your mum and dad. Now get yourself off to school and mind you come back with As on that report card or don’t you bother coming back at all.’ (16-17).

In other words, his good behaviour should compensate the fact that he is black and attempt to ensure that people will regard him as a decent boy, even though they might expect otherwise, led on by their own prejudices about black people. Ironically, what is considered ‘good behaviour’ and ‘a decent boy’ is according to British definitions and the normative expectations they impose on children. The fact that Keith tries to act according to these norms and even seems to succeed, when regarding his successful career and current middle-class status, is intrinsically interwoven with his second generation predicament, since the first generation was already too old when they arrived and the third generation such as Laurie does not feel the need to inscribe the same norms anymore.
An evaluation of the presence of Brenda’s overly compensatory values, for example, indicate that Laurie and Keith are very different. No matter where he is, Laurie always seems to have “the same pair of expensive oversized headphones jammed on to his head” (123).

Once Keith “wants to suggest to his son that conversation might be a good alternative to just cutting himself off in this way, but he decides to leave it” (129). When “he watches as his son eats quickly, tearing at the pizza with his hands than rather cutting it neatly into slices […] he realises that there are some things that he cannot talk to Laurie about. It is probably too late” (125-126). As a greeting to his friends Laurie shouts ‘Yo!’ and throws “a quick hand signal” (129). His way of greeting his father is giving him “that upward nod that begins with his chin” (123). Mainly, Keith is surprised by his one-syllable use of language: “‘Don’t say ‘what?’”

Your mother and I didn’t bring you up to be so rude’” (228). Immediately after it is pointed out in a conversation between Annabelle and Keith that Keith uses idiomatic language such as “has the cat got your tongue” (107) Keith conversely reprimands his son for his use of language when he said: “‘Have fun at parents’ night. I can’t wait to hear what those tossers think.’ He pauses. ‘Not.’ [Keith] looks up at his son. ‘“Not?” What kind of English is that?’” (108) Although it is Keith who had to face a lot more prejudice than Laurie at school and who grew up during the years of “Maggie Thatcher’s police” (41), it is Laurie who is caught fighting, possibly shoplifting and who has to spend a night at a police station concerning someone being stabbed by his friends. Automatically Keith is concerned about any racial abuse that might have befallen his teenage son at the police station. However, Laurie’s answer is clear: “‘What are you on? The copper who interviewed me was black’” (227). Keith lectures Laurie about his behaviour and how he will have to work harder than others in order to succeed (165) and that “[t]here are enough people out there trying to knock you out of your stride. Trust me, you don’t need to be helping them” (125). Keith still equals himself with his son and knows his own confirmatory mentality regarding British expectations of proper
behaviour has raised him on the social ladder, while Laurie feels confident enough to act as any teenager, either black or white, and does not seem to feel the need to compensate his coloured skin or prove people the faultiness of their prejudices.  

Besides his own behaviour, Laurie also thinks about society differently. When Keith takes Laurie to the South Bank in order to reconnect with his son, he tries to explain twice that London is his city too, even though he is black, he was born there and is a rightful citizen. It is on this occasion that Keith realises that “it’s possible that his son already knows this, and that there is no reason for him to acquaint with what he already possesses” (163). On top of London’s Bridge Laurie even highlights their main difference verbally: “‘The thing is, Dad, I don’t know if things are the same now as they were when you were my age’” (176). It is then that he starts talking about respect and loses the understanding ear of his father. This way their difference of perspective is emphasised, while Keith actually wanted to stress their equality, since “there are some things that [he’s] been through [himself] as a black kid growing up in this country and [he thinks he] can tell [Laurie] what [he knows] without it coming over like a sermon” (167). Annabelle actually thinks otherwise as she points out after they have been fetching Laurie at the police station:

‘I’m saying he’s not you, Keith. We didn’t bring him up like you were brought up, remember? No white-working class estate and National Front kids on every street corner. In fact, sometimes I don’t think he’s very streetwise at all. […] The truth is, I just don’t want you to forget that he’s my son too, warts and all, and that makes him softer, okay?’ (202).

Laurie might be softer, indeed, precisely because he is a third generation youngster and thus no longer directly descending from the first generation and their harrowing attempts at

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16 I would even suggest that if Laurie tries to compensate anything, it is rather the whiteness instead of the blackness of his skin. Born from mixed parents he is unmistakeably a ‘halfie’, and as both his mother and headmaster point out, he only wants to hang out with black kids and seems to try to define his identity by belonging to an exclusive circle of black friends.
survival in a society that does not welcome them. While Keith still felt the consequences of this reality in his childhood, Laurie grew up in a household of a white middle-class mother and a black father who nonetheless succeeded at raising himself to the same middle-class. In the end, however, this does not change the fact that both Keith and Laurie grew up having the feeling society is a dangerous place for them. When they talk about his arrest Laurie declares that he had no choice than to take the knife in order not to be stabbed himself:

You can get stabbed in this town for just looking at someone in the wrong way. It don’t matter if you know them or not. That’s why I don’t like to leave my postcode right? And I don’t like public transport neither. It isn’t safe (226-227).

Though the generational differences are clear, there is more than meets the eye, as is typical for Phillips’ plural and nuanced style, and there is no clear answer to the question whether or not father and son mainly differ or are rather similar.

When looking at the text closely, proof for father and son’s similarities interlinking both generations, and sometimes even all three generations, can equally be found. Despite Brenda’s tyrannical values of always looking decent, Keith looks at the teenagers at Laurie’s school gate and decides that “[t]here is no point in his getting too judgmental for, although he would like to imagine otherwise, some part of him knows that he almost certainly looked just as unkempt when he was a sixth-former” (123). While Keith wants to tell Laurie to “act [his] age, not [his] colour” (168) he realises himself as well that “he must now begin to act his age and stop associating with young girls” (106). He resents Laurie for rather going to Spain with some friends instead of going to the Caribbean with his father. Nonetheless, Keith has never visited the place of his ancestors either and when he was around Laurie’s age he went Inter-Railing through Europe and planned to “spend maybe another two weeks in Spain or Portugal, or anywhere that was warm and cheap” (43). Although the explanation that “a part of [him] was waiting until [Laurie was] old enough so [they] could go together” (126) sounds
plausible, it does not seem sufficient. If this was the only reason, why then has he never talked with his father about his life in the Caribbean and does he recognise no one on the photographs he finds in his father’s house (175)? Admittedly, through this box of photographs he wants to encourage his father to tell him about his past. However, Keith longs for some information about his roots at the age of forty-seven, not when he was seventeen like Laurie. Ironically, though Laurie seems uninterested in his Caribbean background he is described as ‘sucking his teeth’ (162). ‘To suck one’s teeth’ is a common expression used for West Indians showing their disapproval or discontent. Thus, even when Laurie wants to identify as a black _British_ teenager, he fails to discard a hint of his black West Indian ancestry. Annabelle makes another comment which links Laurie a lot more subtly to his grandfather: “But nothing ever changes, does it? He’s always got to do things his own way. Even as a baby” (214) ‘Always having to do things his own way’ would be a fitting description for his grandfather as well, according to Keith and Brenda. For example, after he was released from the hospital he would convince Brenda that he had taken certain pills he needed to swallow on a daily basis, while actually he had not, simply because he feels these pills make him fat and he dislikes the feeling of swallowing them (222). There are other small similarities between Keith and Laurie as well. They are both accused of having a short detention span (110), they are embarrassed for having attended a bad football match (154) and they both did not like a certain Will Smith film full of action sequences (124). On a deeper level Keith draws some parallels between Laurie’s feelings and his own based on his own life experience. For example, Keith is concerned about how Laurie feels having to visit his demented grandmother at the Briars (116) because Keith knows how much he hated visiting his own father who did not recognise him in the hospital. He can even understand why Laurie feels distant from himself, as “[s]ons can be unforgiving towards those who hurt their mothers. He knows this from his own life” (166). Even though it became clear for father and son that growing up as a black kid is not
entirely the same for both of them, Keith sympathises a lot with Laurie, because “Laurie is right. Life out there on the street is different for these kids” (229). However, this does not change the fact that “he’s [Keith’s] son and [he knows] something about what he’s going through” (109). In other words, the complexity of their relationship, rising and falling along the lines of their differences and similarities, echoes Phillips’ adversity to simplification and his choice of depicting the plurality in reality, which is so important for his perspective on identity is based on his own experience as a second generation migrant.

The same indecisive complexity can be found in a comparison between Keith and his father Earl. Although Keith and Earl are very much estranged from each other, being from different generations and having an altogether very different relationship with their nation of residence, there are a lot of subtle similarities interlinking both these generations to detect in the novel as well. Keith’s favourite pub, the Queen Caroline, “is one of the local pubs left in west London that has refused to capitulate to the sawdust-on-the-floor and alcopop trend, so at the best of times there are only a handful of ageing drinkers in the place” (37). Other attractive features of the pub are its “melancholy, almost nostalgic, ambience” and its jukebox from which Keith likes to pick the same songs over and over again as a real “creature of habit” (37). Later on, when Keith visits his father, Earl takes him to his local pub. Even though Keith regards this venture condescendingly, it is hard to see obvious differences with his own Queen Caroline. It is equally a “cheerless pub” that “appears to have been abandoned by all but a few drinkers” and “the only thing that might cause his father to vary his routine would be cricket” (177). Keith dislikes Laurie calling his father a “weirdo”, because he is “[s]itting up their in that house by himself” (126), even though Keith worries himself that “his father was in danger of embracing a premature inertia that was laced with a hint of reclusive bitterness”, because “this is what his father’s life has become: television and pub” (177). This raises the question how we would describe Keith’s own predicament at the moment. He lives
alone in his single bedroom flat with currently no job, the naïve aspiration of writing a book and an unhealthy obsession with a girl named Danuta. As we will see later, the novel is interlaced with occasions on which Keith prefers to remain silent instead of speaking up. Saying he is “very private about everything”, the phrase Keith himself uses to explain his father to Laurie, would be a kind embellishment to describe his own inability to converse fluently (126). It is therefore also unfair that Keith is frustrated with his father that “the two of them have never had a proper conversation about the woman who became a second mother to him” (192). Since Keith is not one to easily engage in a conversation either, his father can only take half the blame. Keith could have tried more actively to actually initiate a conversation on the topic of Brenda as well. Moreover, when his father asks him a simple question, for example, about how he is doing presently and how long he is staying, Keith doesn’t provide him with an answer either (178). Both have the habit of bottling up their feelings and thoughts about the things that really matter, because they might be too painful to talk about. Keith thus interprets his father as “somebody whose stubborn behaviour so successfully obscures whatever sensitive or vulnerable qualities he may possess” (52). Similarly, when his father has died, Keith chooses not to tell Annabelle, even when she questions him. Moreover, Keith’s inability to converse openly with Annabelle since the divorce makes her wonder “[w]hat happened to that sensitive boy” he once used to be (224). Both father and son suffer from a troubled head and fail to practice what they preach. While his father states that “[y]ou learn to go on with your life and put both good and bad behind you” (194), Keith declares that “[t]hings end [… t]hat’s just life” (158). Obviously Keith still fails to accept his divorce and his father still resents Brenda for hospitalising him and accuses her of having had another lover in the meantime. His father’s friend, Ralph, correctly describes the Gordons’ predicament: “no matter what [they] say he know that something always causing [them] to worry” (275). Another interesting issue is their view on women.
Keith is very much occupied with the difference between younger and older women, as he compares them on several occasions. He observes “a disrespectful aggression” in young women “that women of his own age would never resort to” because they “no longer possess the gift of youth to embolden their behaviour” (72-73). Moreover, he has noticed that “young women […] by undoing a button, or putting on some lip gloss, or hooking in a pair of earrings can suddenly, and dramatically, transform themselves as though they have plugged themselves in to an energy source” (75-76). Concerning women of his own age, on the other hand, “[he] has never been very good at figuring out whatever it is that [they] do to themselves when they change their appearance, but from experience he knows that it is generally best to say nothing” (150). His father’s generation on the other hand is bluntly clear. His father’s friend on the island, Ralph, is convinced that “women can take a blow and push up their lips and move on like nothing happen” (275). His father has written off any respect for women since both Keith’s biological mother, Shirley and Brenda, have greatly disappointed him. Keith sometimes utters equally blunt statements about women, feeling he has “enough trouble” with them (76), because of “how vindictive and manipulative women can be” (113). Baron, his father’s Jamaican friend, however, provokes a more nuanced response when he asks Keith if he “get rid of the nice white lady?” (187) Keith admits “[i]t’s difficult with women, particularly if they’re the mother of your child”, but he is also adamant on the fact that “[s]he’s still a nice lady” (187). He even wants to be nuanced about Yvette, although his father names it as he sees it:

‘The woman sounds like a bitch.’ […] ‘Man, women can be treacherous, but I suppose at this stage of your life I don’t have to tell you, right?’ He wants to ask his father […] why for that matter, does he think it right to call Yvette a ‘bitch’? She isn’t his favourite person, but he wouldn’t call her that name. (184)
Once again Keith acts like his father on several occasions without noticing it himself. Only when he is in his father’s and his friends’ presence does Keith become aware of the disrespectful attitude this bluntness expresses and consciously tries to voice his opinions more carefully. In other words, Keith seems to get stuck on their differences and fails to look beyond the way his father easily discards the norms of ‘good behaviour’ and his father’s poor working-class life conditions from which Keith has so carefully distanced himself.

To a certain extent, his blindness for their similarities and his fixed focus on their differences can be understood, since it is especially in the presence of his father and his friends that the differences between the two generations are highlighted. Sitting together in a park bench his father is surprised that Keith does not seem to mind the cold: “‘You’re like a true Englishman able to sit out here without a hat or scarf and acting like the weather ain’t bothering you at all’” (185). In the hospital he looks for reassurance to Keith whether he should trust the nurses to know what they are doing (268). He also indicates how estranged he feels drinking a cup of tea in the hospital with his son, an alienated feeling Keith cannot share:

‘You see what I’ve turned into? A bloody Englishman sharing a cup tea of tea and a biscuit with you.’

‘Nothing wrong with a cup of tea.’

‘So I have a son who thinks that there is nothing wrong with an English cup of tea’ (266).

The difference between the two generations could not be portrayed more clearly. Keith is comfortable taking the train, the bus, the tube, using the internet, a mobile phone, an ATM, has no problems hiring an apartment and climbing up the ladder both in society and at work. He has always lived in this British society and grew up gradually learning how to manage these daily aspects of society. For immigrants like his father one of the first challenges off the boat was finding the station, figuring out they had to buy a ticket first and afterwards taking
the right train. The story of his father’s arrival in England, which Earl narrates in chapter five, is evidently the utmost difference between Keith and his father. This is exactly why they both belong to a different generation: the one migrated to the UK and needed to struggle in order to survive, the other was already born in the UK and had to struggle only to improve his situation. Before Earl starts confiding his memories of these hardships to his son, Keith has two conversations with Baron on this topic. When Keith visits Baron’s flat in the Mandela Centre he notices both a picture of Lady Di alongside a crucifix and a bundle of “exotic plastic flowers” as postcolonial traces of a life lived along two societies (262). Baron confesses his impasse of actually wanting to go home, but needing the medication this British society provides in order to stay alive (263). He lectures Keith that his father should be among “[h]is own people” for he experienced what it feels like to live “next door to English people” who do not want you there (263). Although he wants to acknowledge them, Keith feels the problems his parents’ generation suffered do not represent the whole story. Baron laughs at Keith’s suggestion and claims “the kids don’t give a damn” (197). He does not blame them and even believes that “some of them getting through in spite of us, not because of us” (197). Both remain silent and fail to voice what exactly the value of the first generation could be for the second, and consequently the third generation.

My interpretation of the value the former generation could have for the next can be understood through the parallel of the relationships Keith and Earl have or had with those most close to them: their wife, their mother, their father and their son. Both Brenda and Annabelle are white and born in Britain. Though their relationships took place at different moments in time and society had already somewhat evolved by the time Annabelle and Keith became a couple, a lot of prejudice remained. On Earl’s first train ride after his arrival “an Englishman in a grey suit” (287) patronises Earl and although he is convinced that “[i]f you’re good enough to fight and die with us, then you’re good enough to live on my street” (289), he
also feels entitled to lecture Earl not to mingle too much with white girls. Or in other words not to make them pregnant “[o]r [tap] them on the shoulder at ‘Excuse me’ dances” (289). Though Earl did not consciously seek out a white woman with whom he would consequently start a relationship, he ended up with Brenda nevertheless. The first time he takes Brenda out on a date, he imagines her presence as a white woman will alleviate some of the prejudices he encountered in an Indian restaurant where he was unwelcome when he went to eat there alone on a former occasion. Nonetheless, “[f]rom the moment [they] enter the place [he feels] everybody looking down on [him] and [he] can tell that the Indian people are talking about Brenda” (314). Earl’s friend, Ralph, even got beaten up to death because “[t]hey believe all this inter-racial business begin in the dance hall, but what they can’t deal with is when the English girls begin sniffing back” (301). When Keith and Annabelle got married some twenty years later, “[t]he registrar would [still] not look them in the face, and the man’s hand shook as he turned the book around for them to sign” (35). Though society has changed visibly towards a more multicultural variety and its mentality seems to be improvingly tolerant on the surface, underneath the same judgemental ideas against interracial relationships somehow remain. Next to Earl and Keith’s wives, the most important women in their life were their mothers. Earl was at a disadvantage on his island to gain the scholarship in order to be able to study overseas, since his parents did not have any money left to spend on extra lessons. However, his mother always believed that Earl could still succeed. Earl is therefore “sure that part of the reason Desmond gone off to America is to escape the attention that [he got]” (277). Equally Keith had a very close relationship with Brenda and both men lost their beloved mother to a disease. While telling this story Earl also confesses that his father always liked his brother Desmond better (276) “and he never care much for either me or Leona” (281). Thus both Earl and Keith have been spending their lives wondering whether their father even likes them, not to say love. Keith obviously longs to hear from his father that he loved him in order
to bury his ghosts of incertitude, although he is not hopeful this will ever happen. Once his father is hospitalised Keith will finally be courageous enough to ask him what he has been struggling with for almost his entire life: “‘Do you want a son at all?’” (266). It is on this same occasion that his father will finally commence telling what he has waited all his adult life to tell Keith: why he migrated to the UK, the shock he experienced upon his arrival, how Ralph was murdered, his meeting Keith’s biological mother, and finally his years with Brenda and Keith. Right before Earl dies, contrary to Keith’s pessimism, he will entrust Keith that “it’s not [him] that [he] don’t want, it’s this damn life” (318). The question of love can be reversed as well. When Baron asks Keith if he loves his father “he is unsure how to answer this question” (265). Equally, the night before Earl’s father died “he looking at me like he want me to give off some conversation, but I don’t know what to say so I keep one hand steady behind the man’s back, and I feed him the bread with the other hand” (279). As probably all three sons are uncertain about whether their fathers love them, all three fathers must be unsure about whether their sons love them as well. In other words, Keith does not realise that by ageing he is gradually becoming more and more alike to his father, while he does recognise this feature in the equally ageing Annabelle. While Keith was still a child, Earl attempted to reassure him and talk to him on the subject of his mother who had recently died. Nonetheless, when Keith grew older it was “almost total silence, which pretty much summed up the nature of their relationship” (183). “Father and son did attempt to maintain some kind of cordial relationship with each other, but as he grew older they mainly strove to keep out of each other’s way”, which might remind us of Keith and Laurie’s current predicament (190). When Laurie was still a child, Keith frequently spent time with him, for example by taking him to the national Railway Museum. Though currently it is blatantly clear that “after three years of living apart it is evident to him that they are woefully incapable of conversing casually” (168). Since Keith and Laurie are still at an earlier stage of their lives maybe they
can still repair this relationship. No real clues are given to whether or not they will succeed, though Keith clearly vows that “as the grown-up it is his responsibility to change this pattern of behaviour between them” (254). As the second generation is clearly no copy of the first, Keith should use this experience, added with his father’s experience he learned through his story, to change the predicament of his own generation on the subject of father-son relationships as well. A slight chance has already been made, since Earl nor Earl’s father ever found the courage to voice their mutual doubts, but Earl and Keith have had the long-awaited conversation at last, even though it was on Earl’s deathbed. It is now up to Keith to improve the communication on the topic of familial love and care even further towards his own son. In my opinion, it is exactly in the educational aspect that lies the value of former generations and the undeniable fact that a next generation never could have existed and improved their situation, if there had not been a preceding generation first.

Keith’s problem that prevents him from greatly improving his own father-son relationship, however, is that he is convinced that not only his father, but other people equally do not care about him. He even doubts whether Laurie and Annabelle care:

Maybe he should call Annabelle and let her know that he is going away? Or perhaps call Laurie and let him know? Not that he can be certain that either of them will care.

It’s just information, right? (170).

While Keith feels he has unjustly become “Mr Bloody Nobody”, Annabelle equally doubts whether Keith still cares about her and his son (155). Not to mention Laurie, who might wonder why he has hardly seen his father for the last three years, though admittedly, Laurie himself might be equally guilty because of holding a grudge against Keith for hurting his mother (166). Moreover, Keith fears rejection and being disliked in general:

To be misunderstood, and thereafter disliked, is always hurtful. At work […] more often than not he has learned to say nothing further and trust that time will heal any
temporary distress in the workplace. However, as far as women are concerned, he has little experience of how to navigate such awkwardness, and the unfortunate episodes with Lesley and Yvette speak eloquently to this fact (77-78).

This fear of rejection as a person might even be caused specifically by his second generation predicament, if we compare the places in society of all three generations. While Earl has been regarded as an outsider all his life, Keith seems to be accepted on the surface, but remains cautious underneath, and Laurie does not doubt being British, instead he even seems to long to be somewhat blacker in order to belong to a certain group of peers. On the subject of ageing Keith talks about change, which can be read on a more general level: “[W]hy this resistance to change? Change can be good, if you remain vigilant about the direction you are moving in” (223). Unmistakably, a change took place considering these men’s places in society, which evokes the discussion between Baron and Keith: Did these following generations get through in spite, or because of the first generation? Keith obviously has reaped the fruits of Brenda’s severe education focusing on him always being a ‘proper Englishman’ on the outside. Outwardly, Keith found his place in society indeed and at times he does not feel like the outsider anymore, especially when regarding Danuta and Rolf, whom he talks about as “these foreigners” (90). Moreover, when he imagines how they must laugh “with the English and their silly habits, like a different tap for cold and hot water”, this includes himself as well (105). Instead of his father who wished to study Law, but ended up as a janitor at a university, Keith actually got a college degree and an impressive career. His job equally exposes a change in society, since his Race Equality unit hast lost his prioritised spot by merging it with Disability and Women’s Affairs (33). On the inside however, Keith remains vigilant and impulsively jumps to immediate conclusions of racism being involved when, for example, Laurie is at the police station, when the headmaster thinks Laurie will fail and when the parents disliked a comment Annabelle made at parents’ evening. Though a part
of British society nowadays, he remains conscious of earlier days and his parents’ misfortune while growing up, which makes him sensitive for utterances such as Annabelle talking about “our type of people” (160). Though obviously Annabelle means to include him while using this phrase, it recalls earlier days when he and his parents would be the ones being criticised for not being “our type of people” (160). This characteristic of Keith specifically linked to his second generation position will become even more apparent when discussing the themes of the failure of communication and deceptive appearances.

To conclude I would like to return to my first point made about how earlier generations directly or indirectly influenced the following generations. When looking at the photographs of his father’s past, Keith wonders “[j]ust what, if any, connection do these people have to his own life, let alone that of Annabelle and Laurie?” (285). By comparing all three male characters I have attempted to show that contrary to their own belief they are a lot more similar than meets the eye. The first generation influences the later generations both directly and indirectly. It might even be possible to make a distinction between the influence of nature versus nurture. While certain traits of their personalities are subconsciously passed from father to son simply because of having lived together, it is the environment and the society they grew up in that primarily constitutes their differences. Still, by becoming undeniably visible in society, the first generation migrants where the ones who paved the way for the future generations’ altered positions in society. The latter cannot come into existence without the former, which might have been the reason why Phillips chose to describe a first generation story in his debut novel as well. Talking about the tv adaptation of The Final Passage (1996), which will be dealt with later, John Crase suggests the possibility that because “Phillips has become one of those confident, visible black people […, m]aybe, then, he has lost a little contact with Michael and Leila17 and the connections need to be spelt out

17 The main characters from The Final Passage (1985) who migrate to the UK and are thus representative of the first generation.
for himself as much as anyone else” (“West Indians who paved the way”). Obviously, Keith questioning what connection his father’s generation has to himself and his son voices the need to have it spelt out for him as well. Once his father starts telling his life story it will work as a remembrance of those who went before him and could not profit from any integration Keith might have achieved. Nonetheless they needed to endure the misery that fell upon them, or there would have never been a second generation in the first place. Arguably, it is equally because of this realisation, together with the grief of his father’s death, that at the end of the novel Keith “feels exposed and vulnerable. Small. That’s it. Small” (327). He realises that “[h]is father has gone and now there’s nobody ahead of him. Nobody higher than him on the tree” (326). Nobody to pave the way any longer for him, since after the first grew old it was his generation who needed to pave the way further for their children, such as Laurie. Although all three male characters feel disconnected from each other since there is a severe lack of communication, their generations are actually essentially connected in ways that are easily forgotten, but should be attempted to be remembered, for example through novels such as The Final Passage (1985) and In the Falling Snow (2009), an element which will appear to be a main motivation of both The Final Passage (1985) and The Final Passage (1996) later on.

4.3 Communication: a Device of Rejection

Though innovative by handling the subject of generational relationships and the comparison of their experiences more directly, remembering us of the importance and influence preceding generations have on our contemporary reality, the theme of problematic or insufficient communication is not new in Phillips’ oeuvre. In “Caryl Phillips: A Master of Ambiguity” Ledent discusses “some features shared by most characters” in Phillips’ writing, in which both communication and the complex familial relationships are foregrounded (8):
Practically all the individuals in Phillips’s fiction are profoundly isolated, their loneliness being the result of circumstances beyond their control, such as war or deportation, but also of an ingrained inability to communicate successfully often combined with hypersensitivity. Quite significantly, his books teem with unanswered letters and with closed doors symbolizing this incapacity to relate to the outside world. This is also conveyed through the schizophrenic or paranoiac madness that affects mostly his female protagonists like Irina in Higher Ground or Eva in The Nature of Blood, two women whose lives have been shattered by the Jewish Holocaust. […] But these people have nonetheless an irresistible need for company which can never be totally fulfilled. When they come together, their meetings, however sometimes promising, hardly ever materialise constructively as obvious from the number of childless people in Phillips’s universe. So there is a sense of missed opportunities in human relationships. […] The tension between loneliness and belonging, which is after all the common fate of exiled people, is perhaps most dramatically played out in the context of the dysfunctional family, another common denominator of Phillips’s characters. Many of his heroes or heroines have lost their parents or children, often because of deportation or slavery. […] When the protagonists are not separated from their parents, they usually entertain with them a complex, obsessive love/hate relationship that makes them suffer throughout their adult life since they often escape the distressing present by taking refuge in their childhood memories (8-9, my emphasis).

Though the article is written before the publication of In the Falling Snow (2009) it appears to be immensely applicable to this recent novel as well. Keith clearly suffers from the “inability to communicate successfully”, being hypersensitive to the possible reactions of his interlocutors. Nonetheless, he has “a need for company which can never be totally fulfilled”
and which has clearly worsened after his divorce. Though it is his father who was treated for his madness, which caused Keith to “suffer throughout [his] adult life”, descending from “the context of [a] dysfunctional family”, it is mostly Keith who struggles with the feelings of “missed opportunities in human relationships”, especially towards his father with whom he has “a complex, obsessive love/hate relationship”. Keith’s childhood memories are indeed greatly valuable to him, though fail to offer an escape. Rather Keith replays these childhood memories in his head browsing them for clues which could provide him an answer as to why his father and himself missed the opportunity of having a more or less simple and cordial relationship with each other. Concerning the relationships with his wife and son, it is interesting to investigate how they are equally “not devoid of ambiguity, which seems to suggest that, for Phillips, there is neither magical solution to man’s essential solitude, nor any possibility of starting anew, a delusion commonly found in his displaced characters”, yet throughout the novel the communicative processes the protagonist engages in with his wife and son, often through the means of modern communication devices, will gradually transform this delusion in a restoration, though of an altered kind (“MA” 9).

In the Falling Snow (2009) is undoubtedly a contemporary novel in its description of the use of newly developed technological ways of communication such as emails, a blog, and a cell phone with a voicemail function, different phone profiles, and the possibilities of both texting and calling. While these contemporary means of communication guarantee the incessant possibility of conveying both textual and verbal messages to one another, even if either one is temporarily unavailable, this opportunity is not fully exploited. Contrarily, communication is often lacking, despite the overall presence of these appliances, since the will to utilise them and convey any sort of communication, even though one-sided, is often insufficient, as is already clear early in the novel:
As he reached the top of the second escalator, he called Annabelle but the line went almost immediately to voicemail. He thought about leaving a message, but the idea that she might be with her friend Bruce annoyed him so he closed the phone. Then he realised he was being petty, and this was really about his son, and so he opened his phone and for a moment he was rooted to the spot with indecision. It was then that he heard the dull roar of an approaching train so once again he flipped the phone shut (14).

Besides, through the recurrent use of these communicative devices the gradual evolution of communication between both Keith and Annabelle, and Keith and Laurie is depicted, as I will try to show in the following descriptive paragraphs.

As the former fragment illustrates, Keith remains reluctant to contact Annabelle, even after she “has left him yet another urgent message about Laurie and the problems he is experiencing at school” (7). In the second chapter, Annabelle will not even try to reach him on his cell phone anymore, but sends him emails instead:

There are two emails from Annabelle who is clearly still annoyed that he hasn’t made time to meet her and have the ‘urgent’ talk about Laurie’s behaviour, but in the meantime she wants to know if he is coming to parent’s evening. Her second message, somewhat sarcastically, reminds him of the date of parent’s evening (64).

Annabelle obviously feels she cannot count on Keith according to his persistent silence and no evidence to the contrary is provided, as Keith “clicks out of his email account without answering”, until the moment he shows up at her doorstep on the evening of parents’ evening. After their meeting with Laurie’s headmaster, Annabelle and Keith have the conversation Keith has been neglectfully avoiding before. He has therefore nothing to hide from anymore from this point on and when Annabelle has been trying to reach him on his way home, this time he actually responds: “he recognises the number and speed-dials Annabelle, but it goes
to voicemail, so he leaves her a message to call if she needs anything” (119). A few moments later Annabelle, filled with anxiety, calls him back to report Laurie was not at home and she is looking for him on the streets. While still being connected through the phone call, she finds Laurie at a skateboard park. Though she is comforted now that she has found him, Keith remains upset and wants to meet them or at least talk to Laurie. Annabelle, however, refuses and “[t]he line goes dead, but [Keith] continues to hold the mobile to his ear. As long as he holds this pose there is till some communication between himself and Annabelle and their son. He just has to hold the pose” (120). After this wake-up call Keith makes an effort in the next chapter to restore some sort of communication with his son. At first, while going to the movies, Laurie is more interested in texting, which Keith refers to as a “type of clandestine communication”, while Keith is actually waiting to start a conversation with him (124). At a later occasion Laurie cuts his father off by putting on his headphone as well. At Pizza Express, however, they have a conversation about maybe travelling to the Caribbean during the summer and Keith lectures Laurie somewhat on the use of alcohol. Anyhow, Keith feels content, thinking “the trip has been a success, at least they have talked” (129). Arriving at Annabelle’s home Keith is not particularly welcomed and Annabelle reveals to him that [t]here’s some kind of website with a blog on it and people are posting messages” about the relationship he had with Yvette (130). Keith tries to reassure Annabelle that everything is alright with Laurie, describing it somewhat more correctly this time as “we chatted” (131). However, Annabelle remains sceptic, but “she has clearly decided to say nothing further” (132).

From this moment on the tables are turned, since the remaining part of the third chapter Keith will now be the one who fails to reach either Annabelle or Laurie. Though they made an appointment to see a football game, Laurie does not show up. Keith feels both neglected and worried at the same time, being unable to contact Annabelle or Laurie to find
out if Laurie has just forgotten their arrangement or if something has happened. “He presses the redial button on his mobile and tries Annabelle again, but her phone seems programmed to go to voicemail without even ringing out” and “[t]here is no point in trying Laurie’s mobile, for when he called him this morning to arrange to see him, his son announced that his phone would be out of credit by the end of the call and he didn’t have any money to top it up” (153). From an objective perspective it seems bizarre to announce to be unavailable for communication later on the day because of a lack of money. It becomes even more painfully banal when afterwards it appears that he could not reach Annabelle because her “mobile needed charging” (159). A critical note is suggested to these appliances that claim to make you available at all times. Still, even after these acceptable explanations have been offered, they remain excuses of some kind. If either one had really wanted to notify Keith that Laurie would not be coming to the game and that there had been some problems after school, they could have used a pay phone or use someone else’s mobile for a minute. Resembling Annabelle who must have been disappointed in Keith when he chose not to respond to her concerns about Laurie earlier, Keith feels equally disappointed in neither one having the decency to include him in urgent matters, such as Laurie getting involved with shoplifting or a fight. Nevertheless, this situation is restored at the end of the chapter after Laurie has been arrested. When Annabelle calls Keith following Laurie’s arrest, for the first time in the novel Annabelle immediately manages to reach Keith instead of having to leave a message, though only because Keith has “forgotten to switch it off again” (197). Annabelle feels somewhat alienated as well, since she “sounds unsure of who she is speaking with” (197). Unlike the skateboard park incident, this time Annabelle allows Keith to take up his duty and meet them to confront the situation together. In the fourth chapter, both Keith and Laurie have slightly changed their openness towards any communication. After his son has been arrested and Annabelle contacted him to cope with the situation as a family again, Keith “decides to take
no chance. He picks [his mobile] up and adjusts the ring tone to ‘soft’. He will carry the phone through with him and leave it by the side of the bed, just in case” (233). Earlier, however, Keith carelessly left his mobile in the living room. Moreover, when Lesley tried to reach him in the morning, he even neglecting to pick up when it ringed (149). Similarly, while at the beginning of the chapter Laurie is still stubbornly “not picking up” when his parents are waiting to talk to him about his arrest, at the end he has made the effort himself to call Keith. Even though Keith assumes Annabelle must have encouraged him to do so, it could also be possible that Keith’s increased presence lately may have started to convince Laurie subconsciously that his father honestly wants to be a part of his life and wants them to talk to each other, as Keith has tried to convey to Laurie in their conversation on London Bridge earlier (166). Therefore, when Laurie has finally taken the initiative to contact his father, Keith ensures Laurie that he is always welcome to come over to his apartment and “that he shouldn’t feel he had to ask” (253). Although Keith could be criticised because “he didn’t bother to tell Laurie that he would be gone” (253), it could be read as a deliberate choice to remain silent in order not to make Laurie feel rejected when he finally suggests to “do something later in the week” (253). Ever since the divorce Keith’s “access to Laurie was limited to after-school visits and the odd Friday night excursion to McDonald’s” (231), after which the contact declined even further and which Keith is now eager to restore as he claims in the essential final lines of the chapter (254).

In the final chapter Keith is confronted with two moments of shock. At first when Baron called to tell Keith his father suffered a heart attack and secondly when his father dies. On both occasions his instinctive reaction is to contact Annabelle. On the first occasion he immediately tells Annabelle the state of affairs after which he “had no idea what else to say to her” (259). His reflex to call her was not inducted by a need to talk, but by his wish to “hear the reassuring sound of her voice” (284), which is also the case after he returns from visiting
his father in the hospital. This time, his second instinctive thought is to text Laurie. Though he
does not intend to tell Laurie about his grandfather’s condition, it is presumably also for
reassurance that Keith searches any contact with his son. Nonetheless, Keith remains passive,
because “what if Laurie texts him back? What’s his excuse for not breaking off from texting
and giving him a call? He can’t think of anything that he wants to say to his son so he decides
that it’s best not to text. Or call Annabelle” (284). In other words, Keith feels obliged to fill
the air with words once he contacts either one of them. Danuta once said to Keith: “‘You
don’t know? Then maybe you should say nothing. I am happy with silence. Unlike you
English, I do not have to talk to fill in the silence’” (102). Apart from her reference to the
English, Keith recurrently feels he has to talk to fill in any silence indeed, though he often
fails to do so. 18 Hence, though Keith really needs some reassurance from either Annabelle or
Laurie, he fears that contacting them imposes the obligation on himself to talk in order not to
be rejected. In his mind the logic is straightforward: when you call, you need to talk, if you
would not talk, the other person would not want you to call. Since he knows he cannot fulfil
this self-imposed obligation of talking, he chooses not to contact them, thus not even giving
them the opportunity to reassure him without him having to talk incessantly, or, as he fears, to
end the phone call awkwardly if he fails to continue talking. Similarly, when he spends a lot
of time with his weakening father “[h]e dialled Annabelle’s number, but the phone went
straight to voicemail and so he quickly ended the call” (299). After his father’s death “he
realises that he should probably call Annabelle”, though when he reaches her and she tells

18 Some examples can be found on following pages, but are not further dealt with here, in order not to digress too
much: “Her silence is making him uneasy […]” (71). “She silently follows him back down the stairs and he
scrambles around in his mind for something to say” (78). “What should he say? […] The words are in his head.
[…] He feels compelled to speak” (92). “Ruth says nothing, and awkwardness overtakes them both. He realises
that he probably sounds immodest, but it is too late now. Suddenly he is conscious of the telephone in his hand,
and he longs for her simply to ask him what he is doing with his time, or make a joke, or tell him that the
photocopier in the office isn’t working, but she remains silent” (94). “During the short walk he tried to make
conversation by talking about what they might do tomorrow, but his father seemed irritated by his questions and
suggestions and so they re-embraced silence” (183). “[…] this sideshow relieves both of them of the
responsibility of continuing their awkward exchange” (185). “Were his father to open his eyes he is not sure
what he would say to him, so he is grateful for this moment of silent contemplation” (258).
him that Chantelle is pregnant from Laurie, he refuses to tell his father died. It might be because it is still too recent and it hurts too much, though it is possible Keith fears to be excluded from the situation and refused his paternal role again, as Annabelle’s human reaction would be that he should take care of himself first. At the end of the novel Annabelle will take care of him, nonetheless, even without him having to voice what is wrong. Supposedly, his general communicative fear is greatly deepened after his divorce, as following fragment testifies:

However, the fact that he actually confessed suggests to him that a deeper malaise was being expressed by his single act of infidelity, and his confusion might well have benefited from some constructive discussion with his wife. But Annabelle’s unforgiving response would admit no conversation, and she immediately closed down any possibility of dialogue on the subject of how he felt or what had motivated him to sleep with his co-worker. His wife had been betrayed and clearly she was in no mood to compromise (48).

Consequently, my proposition is that Keith’s communicational problems are abstracted from his subconscious fear of rejection. A rejection that depending on the situation might be inflicted by either speaking or remaining silent. This is not only the case in his intimate relationships, but with any kind of social relationship he has in general. Though Keith seems to be distant and self-confident, holding a high position at work, Ledent proposes that actually his almost obsessive attention to neatness and domestic order, [...] might be the expression of a deeply-rooted feeling of insecurity. As a man with a working-class background who has been co-opted into the middle-class through his university

19 For example, he did not want to be rejected by Yvette at first, thus since “[h]e knew that if he said anything critical she would accuse him of being boring […] he remained silent” (11). Some time after he emailed Lesley “[h]e closes his eyes and tries not to worry about the fact that Lesley has chosen not to reply to him” (171). Moreover, he tries to find logical and practical explanations for her silence that not include her unwillingness to have any contact with Keith. When visiting his father he did not call him in advance, though not explained as such, probably because this way his father could not refuse him to visit, as at earlier occasions his father’s welcomes were quite unenthusiastic (172-173).
degree, and to some extent through his marriage to Annabelle, Keith is unconsciously aware that [...] any side step might cause his rejection from the club to which he has been admitted (“DA” n.pag.).

This exact same caution is also transplanted on his choices of speaking and remaining silent, having difficulties to find a balance between both. Mostly, however, a lot of actual conversation is avoided by a lot of metalingual\textsuperscript{20} conversation taking place instead.\textsuperscript{21} By repeating these hollow metalingual phrases Keith gives the impression he is willing to converse without actually having to engage in the conversation itself. This way he does not have to fear the rejection that might possibly result from a real two-directional conversation in which both interlocutors equally take part.

Nonetheless, throughout the novel and the communicative instances discussed above, Keith seems to undergo a subconscious psychological growth. Gradually Keith learns to accept that he cannot erase his infidelity, his confession and the consequential divorce from his personal history. Instead of remaining delusional about this unreal possibility, as is “commonly found in [Phillips’] displaced characters”, he gradually realises that he cannot start anew with a blank slate (“MA” 9). He should therefore rather start from the present, which is undeniably greatly determined by the past, and start to build on this already rich, and possibly fertile, ground. This subconscious insight is the seed of his attempts to restore communicative relationships with his family members, starting from their current predicament, instead of from his vain wishes to return in time. Though some other elements in

\textsuperscript{20} Cfr. Jakobson’s metalingual function, characterised by speech used to talk about the code of conversation, for example when two conversation partners need to define the meaning of words unknown to the other. Interestingly, in this meaning the metalingual function often surfaces at the moment the process of communication has been disrupted. In other words, by this use of metalingual conversation, Keith and his conversation partners unconsciously disrupt the actual conversation persistently.

\textsuperscript{21} A more extensive description of these occasions would lead us too far, therefore only some textual references are given here. A lot of talk about talking takes place: p 75, 109, 111-113, 153, 156, 159-160, 166, 182, 184-185, 198, 201, 203, 218, 228-229, 250, 327, 328, 330. Recurrently considerations are made about how one should converse ‘properly’ following the rules of conduct, for example by not forcing anyone to tell something in particular: p 139-142, 147, 151, 166. Language constructs reality and meaning, which sometimes needs to be redefined: p 134-135, 136, 138, 150, 160, 165, 174, 200, 204, 234.
the plot may have contributed to Keith’s acceptance of his current situation on which he should build,²² it might be interesting to compare the generations once more. In the final chapter Earl finally breaches his “incapacity to relate to the outside world” in starting to narrate his adult life to Keith, which testifies about his own “need for company which can never be totally fulfilled” (“MA” 9). It seems as if he knew his death was approaching and he did not want to miss this final opportunity in the relationship with his son as well. The final lines of the fourth chapter,²³ which I pointed out more than once already, testify to Keith acknowledging the “missed opportunities” in his own relationship with his son and even the will to change this recurring flaw (“MA” 9). This brings us back at my earlier interpretation of the generational implication suggested in this novel. Keith’s generation is very much formed by the first generation who paved the way for them. Since nowadays this first generation is becoming rapidly extinct, it is now the second generation’s task to further pave the way. This ‘paving’, however, should not be an exact copy of what the former generation did, as society has changed to a certain extent and “[c]hange can be good, if you remain vigilant about the direction you are moving in” (IFS 223). Moreover, his father’s death, immediately after changing their pattern of incommunicative behaviour between them, might have worked as an enforced wake-up call for Keith not too wait until the moment of his own approaching death to change this similar behaviour with his own son. Instead of still fearing to be rejected by society as an outsider, which makes him incapable of conversing naturally and thus relating to this society, he should concentrate on those people close to him and not let his fear of rejection be reflected on his intimate relationships as well. Even though the themes of the disruption of the family unit, problematic relationships between parents and child, and a distanced allocation due to the lack of communication are not new, applying it to the second

²² For example, Lesley’s visit to his flat described on page 40, which makes Keith realise that “[h]e no longer cared about the whole pantomime of his fancy job and the consequences of his so-called inappropriate behaviour” and that he deeply regrets his adultery leading up to his current predicament (252).

²³ “During the past three years there have already been too many casual plans made, and too many casual plans broken, and as the grown-up it is his responsibility to change this pattern of behaviour between them” (254).
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generation was. Still, it appears to be no longer feasible to claim that In the Falling Snow (2009) is a clear-cut break from Phillips’ earlier work, since these recurrent themes are inscribed in this novel as well. Moreover, the themes of deceptive appearances and the role-playing people undertake will further deal with Keith’s fear of rejection from his comfortable middle-class spot as a second generation migrant.

4.4 Keeping Up Appearances in a Role-playing Society

Keith’s fear of rejection from “the [rather exclusive] club to which he has been admitted” is not that surprising, since he remains a black man, who consciously experienced the years of Margaret Thatcher’s rule (“DA” n.pag.). Moreover, Britain is a nation in the habit of racially constructing their notion of nationality, as I have already said before. The continual presence of blacks challenged their preset notion that belonging equals being white. Gradually, a revision of that belief came about, but not without facing several pitfalls. One such a pitfall was mainly present during the early years of Keith and Annabelle’s relationship, as Phillips explains in one of his autobiographical essays:

Implicit in the new Thatcherite concept of nationhood was the idea that one could not be both black and British. Black equals bad, British equals good. We will take you as British as long as you look like you belong — no afros, no dashikis, no beads, no shoulder bags, only a suit, tie and briefcase, thank you very much. For the first time in British history, two types of black person were now being officially recognised: the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ — the British and the black, the assimilable and the subversive (NWO 247-8).

Therefore becoming as British as possible was what a lot of blacks tried to accomplish, including the character of Keith. Aleid Fokkema clearly states that this tendency is a snare on the road to acceptance, regardless of which white nation we discuss. “The trap for the
colonial subject”, he says, “is that the means of escape from the racial paradigm is sought in adaptation, in dreaming of the white mask” (290). This issue is clearly dealt with in the character of Solomon in *A Distant Shore* (2003), as I have analysed in “Cultural Plurality in Caryl Phillips’ *A Distant Shore*” (2009), but can be retraced in Keith’s ‘good behaviour’ obsessively imposed by Brenda as well. Fokkema himself uses Frantz Fanon’s example of his fellow Antilleans adapting to the white population in France: “Once arrived, they forget their Creole, speak French without a trace of accent, and start dating a nice European girl” (290). In *A New World Order* (2001) Phillips similarly describes a fitting historical example of the writer Ignatius Sancho who “complicated many individuals’ ideas of blackness” by his decency and “his presence in literary London” (*NWO* 251). However, with the exception of Keith, for none of the three examples their “white mask” will prove to be sufficient in order to be accepted (Fokkema 290). Solomon will still be killed, Fanon explains the mediocrity of Antillean poets precisely “by their desire to behave white” (Fokkema 290) and Phillips states that “Sancho’s dignity and literacy was not going to be enough to face Britain to reconsider the model of a racially constructed nation” (*NWO* 251).

At first sight, Keith, who succeeded in life through putting on what Fokkema calls the “white mask”, challenges the idea that the British roles assigned by society to migrant inhabitants still remain insufficient in order to be accepted (290). However, the omnipresence of such a limited role assignment is still an actuality in Keith’s contemporary London and appearances are deceptive, as some clues throughout the novel reveal. For example, after Keith resigned and gave his former boss, Clive Wilson, a piece of his mind, Wilson will blame it on black rage “were you get all loud and illogical and he’s the calming paternal figure” (*IFS* 249). It is therefore not surprising Keith is still cautious and aware that his appearances are only something you present to the outside world and which can be misjudged easily by that outside world. A lot of this caution and fear of misjudgment or rejection, despite
how properly English he looks and behaves, as he has been taught by Brenda, are nonetheless inflicted by his own insecurity. For example, when he shows up at Annabelle’s doorstep at parents’ night, “Annabelle opens the door and quickly looks him up and down without saying anything. He wants to shake his head for there is no subtlety to her greeting. She still does not trust him, despite the fact that he knows full well how to dress appropriately” (107). Several pages later, however, Keith voices his interpretation of her gesture and Annabelle declares he must have misjudged it: “‘Who said there is anything wrong with the way you’re dressed?’ […] ‘You look okay’” (109). In the same scene a lot of attention is devoted to the way Keith speaks. Annabelle wants him to discard his idiomatic expressions such as “has the cat got your tongue” (107) and “something the dog dragged in” (109), while for Keith it is second nature to talk proper, idiomatic English, just like Fanon’s Antilleans “forget their Creole [and] speak French without a trace of accent” (Fokkema 290). Obviously, both Earl and Keith “[started] dating a nice European girl”, the second argument Fanon provides, but more was needed in order to be accepted by society than that, since Earl arrived nowhere near the integration in British society which Keith enjoys nowadays (Fokkema 290). As I have said before, age might be one difference, since Earl arrived in the UK only to be expected to act ‘English’ in his twenties, while Keith was born in the UK and has been expected to act that way all his life, not only by society, but by his own white surrogate mother as well. Secondly, there is a difference in education. Though both longed to go to university, Earl had to work with no time left to study or even overcome the prejudice of a black man studying. Keith, on the other hand, was provided for, having parents taking care of him in the UK, and actually managed to attend university as a student, unlike his father who could only work there as a janitor. Thirdly, times have changed indeed and race issues appear to have arrived at a stage where they can be treated on the same level as equality for women and disabled people. Nonetheless, as Ledent points out, “this new novel forcefully reminds us that any analysis of
contemporary multicultural Britain cannot content itself with a satisfied and limited appraisal of the relative, yet sometimes deceptive, progress in the present’ (“DA” n.pag.). Moreover she has read In the Falling Snow (2009) as follows:

> In the Falling Snow, by its focus on deceptive appearances, encourages the reader to revise his/her perspective and envision the state of current British society not as the relatively happy outcome of years of struggle and sacrifice on the part of the so-called ethnic minorities, but as just one stage in man’s ongoing search for happiness, where generosity and prejudice coexist and where the present is inextricably interwoven with the past, and even the future (“DA” n.pag.),

While I strongly agree with her, I would like to address the theme of deceptive appearances as an expression of how people play a certain role in society and how this awareness subscribes Keith’s constant fear of rejection and thoughtfulness of the impression he makes, besides his incapability to converse intuitively, though Keith is not completely innocent himself either.

Keith, being the head of the Race Equality Unit and because of his own background, is always aware of people spewing prejudices or judging people because of their skin colour or ethnicity. Nonetheless, he can be very judgemental himself. Yvette, the girl Keith is having an affair with at the beginning of the novel seems only to be regarded by him as a sex toy, since he disapproves of every other interest and taste she has. When Yvette chooses to wear a new red thong “he [cannot] find the words to fully express his disdain for the crass vulgarity of this silly piece of string” (5). Just like her “scented candles make him gag” (5), he doesn’t like the reality television programmes Yvette loves (12) and he has unsuccessfully tried to educate her in his taste of music and wine (12). The music she likes he calls “a discordant cacophony” with “mindless lyrics” (12). After ending their relationship that had no real substance, he witnesses a scene on the train with three youngsters and an old lady. He digresses about how he no longer feels safe with these youngsters like he used to, since “today’s teenagers no
He is not less judgemental about the old lady, though, when he notices she has “two carrier bags of groceries balanced delicately between her feet. [Because, b]loody hell, couldn’t she find a better time to do her shopping” (15)? Besides simplistically judging people and therefore feeling an often ungrounded contempt for them, stereotypical labels are another manner by which society unconsciously expects people to play certain roles and push them to act accordingly. For example, Keith blamed Annabelle’s father for thinking in stereotypes about Keith and ‘his sort’: “You’re rather like the Irish aren’t you, with loud voices that get on one’s nerves and always protesting about what exactly? Mind you, at least you people are not bombing innocent civilians. Well, not yet” (44). As Keith himself was guilty of being judgemental and faultily feeling contempt for other people as well, he is equally prone to thinking in stereotypes. Mostly he thinks about Danuta and Rolf in stereotypical models of nationality and appearances. He thinks Danuta’s face to be “strangely angelic and [thus] he guesses that she is Slavic” (67). Accordingly he describes Danuta’s friend as “a tall blond boy who is Germanic in appearance, but he could also be from anywhere in Scandinavia, or from one of the former Soviet countries” (91). However, when Keith discovers he is Latvian and his name is Rolf, he fails to accept this incongruency, since “for the English [Rolf is] an Australian mock figure” (100-101). Keith continues with his stereotypical thoughts by expecting Danuta’s surname to be “the most jaw-breaking of Polish names; a chain of late consonants strung together with a total disregard for vowels” (90) and equals Poland with Wajda, Lech Walesa, Treblinka and Auschwitz, Kielbasa sausage and Chopin (79). Even though people may appear to act accordingly to the stereotypes by which they are judged, these appearances do not necessarily depict reality and are nothing more than a façade or a role to play. Annabelle’s parents, for example, are typically ‘English’

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24 Moreover he criticises Yvette for not using heavier fabric for her curtains in the bedroom (4), he criticises McDonald’s (92), the watchman at Danuta’s work (100), the ‘BBC yuppies’ in the winebar (110), Pizza Express for its small plates (125), KFC for its bad coffee (200), Bruce and ‘the socialist prattle’ (230), business men in suits (236), media types and the flute glasses their lattes are served in (237-238) and ‘red faced tossers’ like Bruce again (240).
people, associated with flowers and the perfect set of tea, cake, jams and cream for visitors (23-24). They even consider behavioural conventions that highly that after Annabelle’s father has insulted her and she decides to leave he simply “reminded her that she hadn’t even bothered to have a scone or a piece of cake” (26). On her way home, Annabelle realised that “[s]he hated these people, the women with their starched hair […] trying to be decent, but beneath the façade full of contempt and wanting only to be among their own” (27). These last few words imply that even though these white middle-class people may play their roles of decent Englishmen and -women and even though Keith may successfully play the role of the ‘good’ black confirming to an Englishman, underneath it all, still a lot of contempt is to be found against people who are not of “their own” (27). Already in the opening scene of the novel this discrepancy becomes painfully apparent:

    He is walking in one of those leafy suburbs of London where the presence of a man like him still attracts curious half-glances. His jacket and tie encourage a few of the passers-by to relax a little, but he can see that others are actively suppressing the urge to cross the road. It is painfully clear that, as far as some people are concerned, he simply doesn’t belong in this part of the city (3).

Even Annabelle implicitly acknowledges a fragile balance exists between acceptance and rejection, when she lectures him about his affair with Yvette openly displayed on the internet:

    ‘I don’t want you making a fool of yourself.’ She pauses ‘People look up to you. For heaven’s sake, don’t let some desperate girl drag your name through the mud.’ […] ‘I don’t have to tell you what it looks like’ (113-114).

Her final line also points out that it has a lot to do with appearances and what it “looks like”. Judgments and stereotypes are often based on appearances, though these only present the façade and not what is hidden underneath.
Correspondingly, when Keith is ‘looking like’ a good boyfriend, a respectable boss or an eligible bachelor, he often feels like he is only playing a role. Firstly, this is clearly spelt out in relation to Yvette: “A forty-seven-year-old man and a twenty-six-year-old girl. He understood the detached role that he was playing, and he was determined to stay in character” (5). Therefore there is a “predictable pattern” to their relationship in which “Yvette likes to take charge” (5). While she “makes a performance of turning on all the lights”, Keith knows full well that it is “[h]is job is to study the object of his passion as she declares herself now unavailable, and the expectation is that he should tightly reign in his lust” (10). Though Keith is bored by this pattern, he is reluctant to change it and even though he judges Yvette fiercely himself, he fears rejection when he fails to stay in character, since “[h]e knew that if he said anything critical she would accuse him of being boring so he remained silent” (11). Secondly, Keith is frequently concerned about what his co-workers think instead of just playing the role of authoritative superior without any further considerations. Apparently, “Clive Wilson has occasionally reminded him that he is not paid to win popularity contests, and the discomfort of being misunderstood comes with the privilege of being a decision-maker, so he just has to ride it out” (77). Nonetheless, Keith will tell Lesley he “was in the shower” and “hasn’t checked the messages” when he did not respond her call, while actually he was just asleep (149). When he emails her he will rewrite his text several times, in order not to give the wrong impression (169) and when she visits him at his flat he “decides not to apologise for the wine in case it sounds as though he is being pretentious” (249). Equally, when talking to Ruth, “[h]e regrets having mentioned Clive, for it makes him appear anxious and weak. However, this is not how he feels, nor is it the impression that he wishes to convey to his secretary” (94). Thirdly, he plays the role of a decent bachelor towards Danuta. For example, “[h]e wants to reassure her that he earns more than enough to have a car. That he is a respectable middle-class professional man, not some leering jerk who preys on women” (78-
He does not want to be depicted as a man who wants to grab her and have sex with her right away. At the same time he realises that she probably does think this about him, or at least think it is possible, “for she will have felt the weight of his gaze at the library” (70). Even when she starts pushing his buttons, Keith is still concerned about acting the right way “in order not to seem cruel and just throw her out” (147). Because, “[a]s annoying as she is being, he has no desire for things between them to end on a bad note”, which testifies once more that Keith does not want to be disliked and fears personal rejection (148). In other words, Keith plays the role of a boyfriend, a boss and a bachelor with a constant fear of being disliked, carefully weighing his acts, carefully extinguishing his true thoughts and impulsive reactions, just like he avoids to converse intuitively, since he is indeed “unconsciously aware that […] any side step might cause his rejection from the club to which he has been admitted” (“DA” n.pag.).

Obviously, Keith is not the only one playing a role in society, as we have already seen by the example of Annabelle’s parents, their co-village inhabitants and Clive Wilson who puts on a hypocritical charade in the face of Keith, while believing Yvette at the same time. The most striking role-playing is of course Danuta’s scheme. She appears to be married with three children, even though earlier she claimed not to be married at all (72, 209). Ironically, Keith acknowledged she was playing a role only to some extent. He describes her as wanting “to appear confident, but he wonders if behind the bluster she is perhaps unsure of herself” (68) and later on “he notices that she has about her a distinct air of general dishevelment that he is beginning to believe is carefully cultivated” (91). Still, he could not guess her true colours, thus implying it is only normal, expected even, to play a certain role in society and towards other people. For example, when Keith and Annabelle are at a wine bar and the waiter brings the bill he asks the conventional question “‘Everything to your satisfaction?’”, Keith will

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25 Note the double connotation the verb ‘to act’ entails.
26 Ironically, despite all his carefulness, his respectable reputation will be publicly mauled on the blog and he will be strongly disliked by the people on this blog.
answer with “‘[l]ovely, thank you’”, while actually the glasses are still full because they disliked the wine and there is a rift between Annabelle and Keith (118). It would be considered exceptional if he had not responded as the script prescribes. Even Annabelle is guilty of playing a role towards Keith lately. The first time she is mentioned by name in the novel, Keith declares that

> [s]ince their separation some three years ago, she has made it her business to carefully construct a steely façade around her emotions as a way of distancing herself from him. These days she is usually meticulous about keeping both her wit and her levity of spirit well out of sight (7).

This will be confirmed later in the novel when Keith “senses that some other anxiety is troubling her which she will most likely never reveal to him or, he suspects, to this new friend, Bruce” (31) and when her “steely façade” starts to fragment she “stared at him as though embarrassed that she had said too much, and then she gradually came to herself” (232). At the end of the novel, she will let her guard down and let Keith in again, by taking care of him, thus showing him by acts, instead of the carefully constructed conversations, that she still cares about him. Interestingly the other important woman in Keith’s life, Brenda, is the only one who did not play a role according to Keith, since “Brenda was not one to indulge in any pretence” and is simultaneously the one he did not doubt to care about him (84). Brenda never played the role society expected her to, living with the West Indian Earl and mothering his black child. “Judging by the way people were looking at them, [Keith] imagined that they appeared strange together, but Brenda never seemed to mind how people stared at them”, she did not “indulge in any pretence” towards society in order to remain accepted (180, 84). Keith himself, however, concocted a story as a child about how his parents went back to the West Indies and left him with a close family friend, being Brenda, but the appearance of his father on his thirteenth birthday “suddenly complicated his life”
(87). In short, it is expected by society, including Keith, that people engaging in that society act a certain way, according to the roles they are assigned. Keith’s surrogate mother, however, purposefully ignored to play her role of ‘normal’ white Englishwoman by living with a black man and adopting Keith as her own child, 27 which made Keith feel loved and accepted by her.

His father, Earl, on the other hand, could be regarded as a special case in the treatment of role-playing, since in the novel he seems to be depicted as the one who most carefully interweaves role-playing and not playing a role. In the light of this intricate alternation I want to take a look at one of the possible interpretations of the novel’s title as well. Firstly, even before Keith was born, Earl did not conform to the role he was supposed to play in English society, since he wanted to study law at university. Though he will tell Shirley, Keith’s biological mother, that he studies in the evenings (306, 311), he will confess to the reader that “he hasn’t been near the blasted college” when he finds out that Dr. Davies was only interested in him because he researches about immigrants (312). Besides, Earl is not one “to indulge in any pretence” either (84). Since Keith has severe doubts about whether his father actually cares about him, this lack of pretence he notices in his father actually confuses Keith. He fails to understand his father, since “one moment he is cold and aloof, barely communicating at all, the next minute he is smiling, and sorting out his dominoes, and acting as if he’s the life and soul of the party” (178). While actually the fact that his father does not feel as if he needs to ‘act’ around Keith suggests a sign of closeness, Keith interprets this the opposite way and needs Baron to tell him that his father actually likes his presence and is proud of him (195-196). The only moment Keith felt his father cared for him, maybe even loved him, was on his thirteenth birthday, when his father took him to an animated movie and

27 Admittedly, it is slightly more complex than that, since her choice of roles was limited by her incapability to bear children herself. Keith was therefore an unexpected opportunity for her to be able to be a mother after all. The choice that was left to her was to remain childless, and not to fully play the role that is expected of women, or to become the mother of a black boy instead of having a white child of her own, which breached society’s expectations as well. To which extent both possibilities are disapproved of by society and if the one is ‘worse’ than the other is not spelt out, since it is suggested that what mostly mattered to Brenda was her own desire to mother, instead of what society would think.
it started snowing afterwards. Nonetheless, when associated with this moment ‘in the falling snow’ the theme of role-playing will become rather complicated. In the hospital Earl narrates the moment Keith was brought to him at the age of six and he “[suddenly found himself being asked to play the role of the father […] and wonder[s] how the hell [he’s] supposed to play this role” (312). Despite some poor attempts, Earl was too concerned by his own mental problems in order to play this role fully. It is only after he was released from the mental hospital a second time, he came to fetch Keith and finally took it upon himself to ‘act’ as a father. While Keith is shown that both Annabelle and Brenda cared for him while they cease to play a role, it was only when his father overtly started playing the role of father that all his former harshness and silence was being muffled ‘in the falling snow’, and Keith was finally able to “feel his hand tight and safe in his father’s hand” (321), even though afterwards the snow even erased this presence again. It is interesting how this scene is remembered by Keith in a detailed fashion immediately after his father has died. Moreover, Earl’s last words before dying have proven Keith once more that he really did care about Keith, but that his mental problems stood in the way to be a decent father for him. An interesting parallel can thus be read into these two occasions: as if his pending death was the falling snow, covering his harshness and silence again, his story was the animated movie he took Keith to, showing him he cared, and his death afterwards erased his presence again, just like the snow covered his footprints before. Resembling the wake-up call concerning the pattern of miscommunication that is now in Keith’s hands to change in relation to the next generation, Earl’s death also entails a message of how to act and which role to play; that of a father. Once again by learning from how the former generation acted, or in Earl’s father’s case rather fails to act, in playing the role of a father, slight changes are made from generation to generation. This interpretation of the theme of role-playing in connection to the generations can be paralleled with Ledent’s interpretation of the novel. She has read British society “as just one stage in
man’s ongoing search for happiness” (“DA” n.pag.), just like the personal lives of each generation are only one stage on the endless road of continual improvement, incessantly changing while remaining vigilant of the direction they are moving in, as Keith expresses it himself (223).

Equally, the migration the first generation undertook was a life-altering change to improve their own situation, but at the same time, as will appear in the next chapter, it was mostly to improve their children’s future. Though this aspect is hard to construe in the novel The Final Passage (1985) in which mostly Leila and Michael’s own personal motivation is described, in the tv adaptation their children are pointed out as the reason for their migration and more importantly as their reason for staying and enduring the hardships the first generation had to challenge in order to survive. Moreover, in the tv adaptation the depiction of a grown up second generation Calvin with suit, tie and a briefcase shows that he equally plays the role of the ‘decent Englishman’ Keith plays in In the Falling Snow (2009). Interestingly, the main theme of the role-playing society in In the Falling Snow (2009), was equally present in A Distant Shore (2003). Moreover, role-playing has been subtly present in earlier novels as well. In Higher Ground (1989), for example, the slave translator in the first part of the novel is unwillingly pushed into the role of a traitor of his own people, by being forced to collaborate with the slave traders. In Cambridge (1991) both the plantation’s owner white daughter Emily and the black slave Cambridge are pushed in their role designed by society. Emily has no authority and displays a naïve kind of knowledge, since these elements are no part of her female role. Cambridge’s identity has been changed multiple times according to the place where he resided and the role with which he was assigned. In the end he will be pushed into the role of aggressive murderous slave, which is the role that the official journalistic discourse after his execution made of him. In Crossing the River (1993) Nash’s

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master equally started playing the role of father towards his talented slave, while the black slave Martha, on the other hand, failed to play the role of a mother, after both her husband and daughter were sold to different white owners. Most significantly, however, is the theme of role-playing inscribed in Dancing in the Dark (2005), since it narrates how the entertainer Bert Williams struggles with having to play the black coon on stage every time he blackens his face and draws red full lips on his face. Even though he has escaped playing the imbecile savage in a cabinet of curiosities, he feels his current situation of role-playing is not better. In other words, his performative bondage to this degrading role of the coon forms a new form of enslavement. Moreover, his marriage might be an enactment of role-playing as well, since it is suggested that he might actually be homosexual. In other words, though the aspect of role-playing can be interpreted in In the Falling Snow (2009) as a very specific second generation predicament in Keith’s case, it is not a completely new theme in Phillips’ work either.

4.5 In the Falling Snow as a Second Generation Novel

At the beginning of this chapter we have seen that the generational differences, though alongside several similarities as well, illustrate a changed position in society for Laurie in comparison to Keith, and for Keith in comparison to Earl. Keith’s specific second generation predicament leaves him with an ambiguous feeling of belonging. Though outwardly he is the ‘good’ black Englishman with a proper education, a successful career and decent appearances, his feelings do not conform to this role he plays. Any wrong word or act may unmercifully degrade him again to a low working-class foreigner, as some people still expect him to be, underneath their carefully constructed egalitarian façade. This fear of rejection and being disliked in the face of society is sadly transplanted to his personal life as well. He unjustly feels disliked by his father and after his divorce fears that his wife and son accordingly do not care about him anymore. The cathartic last chapter in the novel in which Earl’s story is told
urges Keith on to realise a number of truths. His father’s generation is more inextricably connected with his own and, consequently, his son’s generation than he considered it to be. Now that his father has died, however, it is his responsibility to further pave the way for the later generations and even try to improve reality for them. On a more general level Keith consciously attempted to improve race equality through his job. What he actually should focus on is to try to improve his personal relationships with his son and wife. Something Earl only managed to do on that rare occasion ‘in the falling snow’ and right before his death. It is therefore suggested that Keith should reconsider his fear of both conversing and acting ‘wrongly’, inflicted by his second generation predicament and the subsequent fear of rejection, in order not to become an incommunicational and detached stranger to his family, like he felt his father was to him and Brenda. He should rather start talking honestly and openly, get over his midlife-crisis and take his role as a father and a husband seriously again. For only then will he feel cared for, accepted and fully integrated in his family, when he finally shows that he cares about them himself. Hopefully thus the lesson he learned from the generational gap caused by miscommunication between himself and his father will improve the widening distance between himself and his son, and later on between his son and grandson, since several generations will always be inextricably connected both on socio-economic and personal level. However, this connection is easily forgotten in a rapid moving contemporary society as London, which often wrongly appears to be more tolerant outwardly than it actually is underneath all the carefully constructed façades. This interpretation of the novel, even though some themes were already present in earlier novels as well, confirms that Phillips has finally laid bare some of the peculiarities of his second generation through the character of Keith, instead of overtly picking up the historically and geographically defined themes he appears to be so fond of again. Phillips has the habit of placing his novels thematically in the four continents to which he feels connected: Africa, Central-America,
North-America and Europe. Besides, he writes about slavery, anti-Semitism and migrants, as expressions of unbelonging and being regarded as inferior either because of their complexion, religion or country of birth.²⁹ At the same time, however, a novel focussing on contemporary London and its second generation is engraved by its geographical history of unbelonging. Obviously, slavery, in a movement from Africa to the Caribbean in Central-America, organised by Western colonisers, thus including Europe as well, by means of inferiorising large numbers of people, even after abolition and after these West Indian people migrated to their mother country in Europe, is what finally led to the contemporary presence of a second generation in London. Still, the only visible trace of this history in the novel is Earl’s story of migration. In other words it seems as if Phillips has indeed moved beyond the themes of geography and history in this novel, since he clearly focuses on the present and its multicultural society. Admittedly, the same could be said to some extent about A Distant Shore (2003) as well, but no mention of a second generation is made there, and that is exactly what makes In the Falling Snow (2009) so interesting and urgently topical. If we only focus on my second generation analysis and the move away from geography and history, it seems as if the critics were right in treating In The Falling Snow (2009) as an altogether very different novel, compared to his earlier work. Yet, some themes have proved to be a continuation of Phillips’ earlier works as well. Moreover, I would like to use his first novel The Final Passage (1985) and its film adaptation (1996) to try to emphasise even more that this move towards the second generation contemporaneity does not necessarily mean that this novel completely breaches the consecutive chain of Phillips’ earlier work and could even be regarded as a logical result of his preceding novels.

²⁹ This description is a simplified generalisation for the sake of my argument. A more nuanced description of what Phillips’ novels deal with is already given in the previous chapters.
5. The Final Passage (1985 & 1996) : Motivated by a Second Generation’s Concern

5.1 The First Generation’s Story in The Final Passage (1985)

At first sight it seems as if the sole correlations between The Final Passage (1985) and In The Falling Snow (2009) are to be found in Earl’s story, which deals with his migration and arrival in a severely prejudiced England. His story is conveyed to Keith and the readers in three parts. In the first part he narrates about the shock he encountered when his boat finally arrived in England, his memories of both his best friend Ralph’s and his brother Desmond’s departure from the island, his childhood wish to gain the scholarship to study overseas and finally his father’s death after which Earl’s sister proposes him to travel to the UK at last. In The Final Passage (1985) the events leading up to Leila and Michael’s decision are conveyed in the second chapter called Home, chapter one named The End tells about Leila standing in line to board the ship and their goodbyes to their best friends Millie and Bradeth. Chapter four, The Passage, conveys their journey on board and their arrival, followed by their first train ride and the narration of the difficulties considering housing and employment which befall black people in England. Earl’s first train journey and his experiences with housing and employment difficulties are told in the second part. As Michael presumably does, Earl’s friend Ralph dwells in a West Indian community. Something Leila has no connection to at all, and though Earl is connected to this community through Ralph, he fails to feel strong affiliations with these people himself. Though the events in Earl’s final part bear no resemblance to the events in England and Winter, the third and final chapter in The Final Passage (1985), apart from the fact that both Earl and Leila lose someone they sincerely love, I would parallel these chapters with Earl’s third section as well. These paralleled parts explain how either Earl and Leila arrive at a sort of desolation and madness, because of the severe disillusions and shocks they experienced since their arrival on English soil. Earl loses his
friend Ralph after he is beaten to death because of his relationship with a white girl. He meets Ralph’s sister, Shirley, after Ralph’s been hospitalised and on this occasion Keith will be conceived. Since Ralph has died, Earl feels even more distanced from their West Indian community and though he still comes to the same pub, he rather hangs out with the barmaid, Brenda, instead of with the other West Indian men. After some time, he finally finds the courage to ask Brenda out, but when Shirley appears to be pregnant it all becomes too much and Earl is hospitalised for his mental condition. Five years later he is released and asks Brenda to marry him. They go and live together and when Shirley dies a year later, Keith is brought to them by his stepfather. Though Earl tried for Keith, he failed to overcome his mental problems and needed to be hospitalised again. Though Keith experienced this as a rejection of himself by his father, Earl explains that Keith was his solace, since the real problem was the continual disillusionment he suffered in England. In The Final Passage (1985), for Leila home was where her mother was and after she dies she is abandoned, not only by the dream of this new country and her husband, but by her only family member as well. Left in desolation, with no money and pregnant again, it all becomes too much to bear and she loses herself in desperation. She wanders the streets and starts having an imaginative conversation with her baby son, whom she considers to be her only and best friend. Without describing both stories in detail, it becomes apparent that clear parallels can be drawn between Earl’s story and The Final Passage (1985) and that they touch upon the same themes in the journey of the first generation migrants.

Since The Final Passage (1985) has been written quite some time ago, a considerable amount of critics have drawn attention to this novel and pointed out some interesting points of interpretations. To start with, I will present a brief selection of interpretations I deemed interesting in order to broaden the understanding of the novel. Afterwards, I will move on to a number of elements several critics pointed out in connection to the migratory history and
which can be interesting to regard when speaking about *In the Falling Snow* (2009) as well. A first element which has been pointed out by several critics is the peculiarity of Phillips’ choice to tell the *The Final Passage’s* (1985) story from the female point of view. As Ulla Rahbek says,

whereas writers like Sam Selvon, George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul concentrate on what happened to *male* migrants, who were usually single and who wandered purposelessly from place to place, Phillips, on the other hand, tells the relatively untold story of the *female* migrant of the late 1950s, accentuating her difficulties in keeping herself and her family together, and he delegates the same aimless male character to a marginal position (128, original emphasis).  

Moreover, she describes Leila as “the visible embodiment of what Phillips deals with in most of his novels: how power and race intersect with sexuality” (129). According to Maria Lourdes López Ropero “Philips is touching upon the gender politics of Caribbean society, where woman play a ‘minimal’ role ad where there is in the author’s words ‘a long tradition of wilful or unwilful neglect or absence on the part of men. They had to perform migratory labour, but there is also wilful irresponsibility (Saunders 1987: 47)” (92). She argues that “Leila’s migration experience does not prove to be empowering for her, but makes her extremely vulnerable and more dependant on Michael for support” by which, in other words, “[i]mmigration […] may renew and strengthen the patriarchal structures brought from home” (93). Nonetheless both López Ropero and Rahbek argue that “Leila has actually grown through her ordeal in Enland” (López Ropero 95). Nonetheless, “Leila has to face the disruption of her own family, the loss of her husband and how it feels to be nothing” before she “seems to come to terms with her own cowardice, her own inability to face herself and admit defeat” as a sort of “act of self-acknowledgement” (Rahbek 133). Michael, on the other

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30 The same has been argued by David Ellis in “Caryl Phillips: Caribbean Conversations II”, Bénédicte Ledent (2002) and Maria Lourdes López Ropero, who refers on her turn to critics such as James Clifford and Gail Low.  
31 The same is argued by David Ellis in “Caryl Phillips: Caribbean Conversations II”.

hand, is strongly guided by the picture his grandfather painted for him of the island as a futureless shack and the only way to escape this island of slavery is to migrate and become successful overseas. Michael is therefore determined not to let his grandfather down, even if this means he has to discard Leila and Calvin for the sake of his cause. However, “[t]here are two prevailing views about the land”, while “Michael’s grandfather believes that it has no possibilities for personal growth and success, […] Millie sees in it security and the triumph of the human spirit to survive amidst harsh conditions” (Goddard n.pag.). This brings us to the other main characters in The Final Passage (1985): Millie and Bradeth. Both characters can be read as a version of the suppressed Other within the self of either Leila and Michael. In Gordon Slethaug’s “The History of the Double. Traditional and Postmodern Versions.” we read the gradual development of the idea of the double as a literary motif, based on the theories of psychoanalysts Freud, Jung and Lacan. While “[t]he ego governs one’s performance in the known and perceptible outer world, [the double] dominates the unknown – or partially known – hidden inner world. When the two are in balance, the self is complete” (Slethaug 16). Since Leila and Michael, both in search of their true identity, fail to arrive at a harmonious identity of the ego and the double, Millie and Bradeth are used as foils, contrasting with and thus enhancing Michael and Leila’s outer qualities. For example, in Leila “too much emphasis is placed upon reason and order”, since her distanced mother has never learnt her to follow her emotional impulses and thus lacks an inner serenity which can be found in Millie (Slethaug 16). Millie is the one who dares to express that she loves the Caribbean island, something Leila only will realise at the end of the novel: “You maybe don’t see it, but me, I love this island with every bone in my body. It’s small and poor, and all the rest of the things that you and Michael probably think that is wrong with it, but for all of that I still love it. It’s my home […]” (FP 115). Moreover, Millie is the one who openly confronts

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32 As described by both Horace Goddard and López Ropero.
Leila with the reality of Michael having another woman and child on the island, which she thinks to be unacceptable, while Leila fails to let her emotions interfere and rationalises this reality, after which Millie accuses her of thinking “like a man now” and “[she] is a coward, [she] too damned scared to come out and admit when [she] done something wrong or when [she] do make a mistake” (FP 60).\textsuperscript{33} Regarding Michael and Bradeth, Michael is the one who follows too much on his emotional impulses and whims, without taking any responsibility and considering other people’s feelings, while Bradeth will be the one who stops fooling around once he learns Millie is pregnant and who takes up his responsibility and accepts his paternal duties. As Millie dares to express her love for the island, Bradeth acknowledges that “[l]ife can be good” when he and Michael are just sitting about “in the sun, drinking beer, listening to music and talking”, while Michael only manages to express his feelings by saying “it’s not that easy” and fails to lay his finger on the actual wound (FP 28-29). Since Michael disappears in the novel, no argument can be made for the growth Michael may have gone through. However, the fact that he “never seems to grow up in the novel”, since “[h]e is a drunk a womanizer and a failure as a father” the last times he is present in the novel, suggests that it is safe to argue that Michael remains oppressing the other within the self (Goddard n.pag.). In all these interpretations a strong emphasis is laid on the specific predicament of the first generation, while the second generation is nowhere to be found. Going back in history might thus be indeed somewhat reductive on Phillips’ side. Yet, when reading how critics dealing with The Final Passage (1985) often write about the history encapsulating this first generation and leading up to the second generation, I was often reminded of In the Falling Snow (2009) and came to believe the foundation of this novel was already laid with The Final Passage (1985).

\textsuperscript{33} Ulla Rahbek was the one who placed both scenes together in her description of Millie, after which I read the character as an expression of the other within the self.
5.2 Laying Bare the Foundations of *In the Falling Snow* (2009) in *The Final Passage* (1985)

Articles written about *The Final Passage* (1985) often commence with assigning the novel a place in history before moving on to an interpretation of the novel and its characters, for example in comparison with Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). Through these frequently quoted historical aspects of respectively the title, the SS Windrush, English legislation and the collective communal memory, and some interpretations of the characters afterwards, I will touch upon some seeds in *The Final Passage* (1985) which may have grown in a novel such as *In the Falling Snow* (2009) more than twenty years later. Chronologically, we should start with the title which situates the novel “within the historical from the slave trade” (Ellis “Caryl Phillips: Caribbean Conversations II.” 2007). The Middle Passage is the journey slaves made by boat from Africa towards the Americas, which was at the same time often the final passage they made as well. In the novel, however, the final passage may refer to either the passage from a small Caribbean island towards the UK, which the main characters actually undertake, or the passage from the UK back to the Caribbean island, which Leila considers at the end of the novel. Both possible interpretations parallel the open-endedness of the novel, for which no solution is provided. Moreover, the ambiguity may be stressed by the blank Christmas card Leila receives on the final page: it could be a helping hand who reached out in this cold environment, yet the lack of any signature of the sender leaves Leila isolated and lonely all the same, since it might have been from an anonymous corporation as well (*FP* 205). Moreover, Horace I. Goddard, a West Indian immigrant himself, states that ‘travelling’ “in West Indian folklore also refers to the journey of the spirit or soul before a person’s death” (n.pag.). Since Leila’s mother dies in the novel, her soul may

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34 As we have seen, for example, in the peculiarity of telling *The Final Passage* (1985) from a female’s perspective and whether the characters, once in England, dwell in a West Indian community or not, as will be dealt with in the third argument of this section.

35 As is also noted by for example Bénédicte Ledent (2002) and María Lourdes López Ropero.
be the one taking the final passage before her death. In this case the title might resonance the crucial relationship between Leila and her mother, which is especially important in shaping Leila’s feeling that she is at a loss in her quest for her own identity. Alienated for either being too white on the Caribbean island or too coloured in England, her feeling of unbelonging is the only core her identity encapsulates. This alienation is even more implemented because of her incapability “to express this feeling of being displaced to herself, to her mother and to Millie”, as Ulla Rahbek claims (131). Moreover, she is incapable of expressing these feelings to anyone: not to her husband, her friend Mary and the social worker Mrs. Gordon, either. Interestingly, Rahbek describes her “failure of communication [as] something she has inherited from her mother; the only legacy her mother passes on to her”, which might remind us of Keith’s inherited incapability of communication, before she goes on to describe “the four significant moments in the novel where Leila has unresolved confrontations with her mother” (131). The first two occasions are the sole moments in Leila’s life when her mother gave her a beating, without explaining why she did so, which left Leila undergoing these beatings with a severe lack of understanding. The following two occasions narrate an abandonment of Leila by her mother. The first time is when she turns her back on Leila on her wedding day, the second time when she leaves for England, without warning Leila in advance. According to Rahbek

[t]he result is that Leila herself never understands the mother that she loves so much, that she dreams of getting to know. Nor does she learn how to relate emotionally to others and she feels uncomfortable when people get too close to her (132).

Undoubtedly, this reminds us of Keith, who failed to understand his father, with whom he longed to have a proper relationship, or at least a decent conversation. While Keith, being second generation, somehow arrives at the completion of this wish on his father’s deathbed, Leila, still first generation, remains with her wish unfulfilled, as was the case with Earl, since
“[w]hen her mother dies, Leila’s dream of a shared life, of an ideal mother/daughter relationship dies with her (Rahbek 135). Moreover, as after his father’s death Keith is left with the realisation that now he is the one left on the highest spot in the hierarchy, which makes him responsible now for the following generations, Leila is equally confronted with her present situation and the future of her children after her mother’s death, since she “is finally on her own, face to face with her own self[,] her future”, and that of her children (Rahbek 135). A parallel can be easily made between Leila’s mother and Earl’s father as the generation preceding the first,36 who fails to connect with their children, explain what colonisation has done to them and therefore passes on a legacy of failing to communicate to the first generation such as Leila and Earl. However, as we have seen in In the Falling Snow (2009) Earl breaches this behavioural pattern on his death bed and thus creates the hope that Keith will equally change his incommunicational behaviour towards his son Laurie at the age of forty-seven already, instead of waiting until the moment before his own death. In The Final Passage (1985) no further narration is provided, though the often quoted scene in which Leila starts talking to herself in an imagined conversation with Calvin about the colour of Santa’s skin may possibly foreshadow the willingness to one day actually talk about such quandaries with her children. Moreover, when she imagines returning to her Caribbean island, she equally imagines her children to make the passage to the UK and back as well and then they will have “shared something that she knew was beyond her or anyone else’s explanation” (FP 204). However, if Leila should never return, her children will not be able to share the same experience of migrating as she did, and thus she will have to find another way, presumably through communication, to let her children understand her own migratory experience.

36 There is a difference, nonetheless, since Leila’s mother migrated herself as well, though not to commence a new life in a new promising country, but in order to find a cure for her illness, which appears to be in vain. Therefore she will only have migrated to the UK to die there. Earl’s father on the other hand, never migrated and died on his own Caribbean island.
Secondly, references are often made to several historical dates preceding this novel in 1985, starting with 1948, the year of the SS Windrush:

The year 1948 is commonly accepted as the beginning of a large scale immigration to Great Britain: it is estimated that a quarter of a million people from the new Commonwealth settled in the United Kingdom between 1948 and 1962, the year that witnessed the end of free immigration to Great Britain. In 1948 the liner *Empire Windrush* arrived at Tilbury carrying 492 Jamaicans; the name of the liner became the symbol of the whole generation of West Indian immigrants (Kubisz 125).

The second date mentioned here, 1962, is the year in which the first Commonwealth Immigrant Act was legislated (López Ropero 85). Six years later Enoch Powell gave his infamous Rivers of Blood speech right before the Race Relations Bill would come before Parliament. Powell feared that this act would be 

the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organise to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have provided. As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood’ (Telegraph).

Significantly, exactly ten years later “Margaret Thatcher [...] delivered her overpowering statement, warning the audience of the danger of being ‘swamped by a people of a different culture’” (López Ropero 85). Some years later, in 1981 the British Nationality Act was legislated as “the latest move [...] curtailing black immigration that begin in 1962” (López Ropero 85). By this process of legislation and blunt public statement “[t]he second generation born in Britain was [consequently] constructed as ‘an enemy within’” (López Ropero 85). As I have mentioned before, their “[r]acial unrest was channelled through the blacks riots of 1981 and 1985, which led Powell to renew his call for repatriation in 1985 as the only solution for
the problem” (López Ropero 85). As this appears to be a politically important period for the second generation, why then did Phillips fail to address this topical reality more directly? Ledent explains that for Phillips “history is the best way of knowing where you have come from, and hence of knowing where you are going to, provided it is not idealised, but assessed with honesty and open-mindedness” (Caryl Phillips, 2). This might have been the reason indeed why Phillips chose to tell the story of a first generation couple at times when the presence of a second generation had become so controversial. Another more plausible explanation, however, could be found in The European Tribe (1987). In this novel Phillips narrates his journeys throughout Europe, which provided him with informative encounters. For example, after meeting a Polish writer who was the victim of severe censorship, Phillips had learnt that in a situation in which history is distorted, the literature of a people often becomes its history, its writers the keepers of the past, present, and future. In this situation a writer can infuse a people with a sense of their own unique identity and spiritually kindle the fire of resistance (99).

The overview of historical events given above, shows how political discourse distorted the history of the second generation as if they were the enemy and their presence was their own fault. Therefore it might have been interesting to remind British society with a novel as The Final Passage (1985) why the second generation was actually there, as descendants from the first generation, such as Leila, whose “voicelessness stands metonymically for the voicelessness of a whole generation of black Britons” (Pirker 278). In In the Falling Snow (2009), on the other hand, the distorted history is depicted in the deceptive appearances of British society as “the relatively happy outcome of years of struggle and sacrifice on the part of the so-called ethnic minorities” (“DA” n.pag.). It was therefore Phillips’ task once more to remind society of the history which made the presence of a second, and in the meantime even a third generation, possible. Moreover, he also reminded society of its own distorted
presentation, since it holds up a façade full of tolerance and increasing integration, while underneath a lot of contempt and uncertainty for ethnic minorities still remain an everyday reality.

This theme of collective memory which needs to be refreshed is often handled together with a comparison of Phillips’ work with Sam Selvon’s work as well.\(^{37}\) Before Phillips, black urban imagination has been dominated for years by Sam’ Selvon’s literary London of the 50s and 60s, the image which has become a point of reference for many writers. Sam Selvon, a Trinidadian, is usually associated with so-called ‘London Fictions’ which include novels whose action takes place in London in the West Indian communities (Kubisz 126).

In comparison with the prominence of these West Indian communities in Selvon’s work, in *The Final Passage* (1985) no clear accounts are provided of how and with whom Michael spends his time in London after deserting Leila. However, it is probable that he resides in a West Indian community, together with his West Indian colleague Edwin, such as Earl did together with his friend Ralph after arriving in England. Leila, on the other hand, has no relation whatsoever to a West Indian community in England, which makes her isolation all the more final. Secondly, while in Selvon’s London “its appeal is stronger than the sense of rejection and bitter loneliness it produces”, for Leila, her confrontations with London are precisely “marked by [this] sense of rejection” (Kubisz 129-130). Already experiencing communicational problems as an inheritance from her mother this urban rejection only enforces her “lack of communication and cultural exchange” (Kubisz 132). The same can be said for Keith, who has no West Indian community to dwell in like his father. The only West Indians he knows are his father’s friends, who he can hardly relate to, not knowing the first generation’s story properly enough and not being able to share the experience of a second

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\(^{37}\) For example by David Ellis, Marzena Kubisz, Bénédicte Ledent (2002), Ulla Rahbek and María Lourdes López Ropero. Besides Selvon, Ellis, Ledent and Rahbek also mention writer George Lamming.
generation identity with them. As said before, his isolation is equally enforced by both an actual sense and the fear of a rejection from the contemporary London Keith occupies for almost twenty years now. Still, he does not feel he is fully accepted by this city and its inhabitants, and is careful not to make any wrong moves in order not to bring any wrath upon himself and being degraded to the conditions of his parents’ generation and his childhood years again. “Home is where you feel a welcome” according to Leila’s friend Millie, though after seventeen years and after being visibly integrated in this society, Keith still fails to feel an unbiased ‘welcome’ in London, since prejudice and contempt are always luring behind a corner somewhere (FP 115).

After the historical connections or some comparison with a former writer is established, the aforementioned critics move on to a further interpretation of the story and the main characters. Herein some obvious similarities between The Final Passage (1985) and In the Falling Snow (2009) can be found as well, as we have already seen in the analysis of In the Falling Snow (2009). Goddard, for example, mentions the theme of a “failed relationship between the sexes” which is of course relevant in the case of Keith, on the one hand, and Annabelle, Yvette, and Lesley, on the other (n.pag.). Similarly López Ropero writes about Michael who has “married a woman superior to him by his society’s standards”, as Keith has also married the white middle-class Annabelle who is regarded as superior to him by British society (92). However, for Michael this results in his mistreatment of Leila as a sort of “safety valve for his anger and frustration”, while for Keith this only enforces his fear of societal rejection and the assumption that Annabelle does not care about him on the same level as he does (López Ropero 92). Even before they married Keith was convinced that Annabelle would chose her parents above him and his adultery some twenty years later may have been a poor attempt at leveling the playing field. This brings us to one of the most obvious themes of The Final Passage (1985), described by Rahbek, which can equally be found in In the Falling
Snow (2009): “the disruption – the break-up – of the family unit” (133). While no further explanation of this theme is needed anymore at this stage, I would like to digress on the next theme.

Another topic several critics have dealt with is the idea of the passage from the Caribbean to the UK as a journey towards disillusion. Kubisz states that

[a] powerful myth of Great Britain as a mother country awaiting their sons and daughters had been deeply rooted in the West Indian consciousness […] What is more, Great Britain was presented as a paradise and a land of opportunities, where due to the shortage of labour work was waiting (124).

Echoing Michael’s grandfather’s idea about his own island in comparison to the UK, Great Britain is also described “as the mythical land of healing powers: it transforms a failure into a success. Great Britain is destination and is destiny” (Kubisz 125). While Michael and Earl hoped to make a success of themselves, Leila hoped to make a success of her relationship with both her husband and her mother, once arrived in the promised land. When Earl explains to Keith that “[t]he idea of England is fine. I can deal with the idea. You understand me, son? I can deal with the idea” he refers to exactly this idea of Great-Britain as the Promised Land that he had in mind and which was already greatly destroyed upon arrival, which caused the first severe trauma leading up to his mental condition (IFS 319). In López Ropero’s article we read how in *The Final Passage* (1985) “[t]he doomed character of the immigrant’s journey to England is already anticipated in the description of the ship’s deck” (89). What interests me most, however, is Ellis’ approach to this bitter sense of disillusionment immigrants encounter upon arrival. He explains that

[o]ne way in which this condition might be measured is through the notion of national identity. Most migrants’ accounts describe the shock of having their own sense of themselves as British subjects ripped away by hostile white British attitudes. […]
[T]he emigrants enter a new perceptual field which would see them become immigrants. In crossing this discursive/ideological line, they fall prey to a new set of social determinants and find themselves cut off from any previous certainties. […] The criteria by which the migrants had measured themselves previously – island nationality, occupation, country/city divide – all become erased as they are pulled into a scenario where those criteria of identity are ignored. […] [Some] in the emigrant group also come to recognise that while they have not changed as individuals, the way they are being perceived has, and they must adapt themselves to such perceptions (71-72).

Upon arrival the Caribbean migrants are automatically pushed into the role of foreign immigrant, which accompanies a sense of loss of the self, since their former identity fails to conform to the role British society has assigned them to play. Leila, for example, is pushed into the role of grateful charity case by the white women she encounters, though she refuses to play this role, since she distrusts these women and experiences their roles as hypocritical. The first of these women she encounters is immediately after leaving the boat in the form of a “woman in Salvation Army Uniform” who wants to offer her a bowl of soup (FP 145). Once she has been settled in Florence Road these women are materialised by her neighbour Mary and the social worker Mrs. Gordon. Though Leila considered Mary as a friend at first, she fails to overcome the discrepancy between her helping hand and the fact that Michael has been ‘stolen away’ from her equally by a white woman. Moreover, these women do not only threaten her marital relationship, but “herself, and what she was”, because in this country, in this role, “she was more coloured than she had ever been before” (FP 194-195). Though all these women think they are doing the right thing by extending a helpful hand to Leila and wanting to take care of her, actually they infantilise her while pushing her into this uninvited role that needs these women’s help and care as if they were her mother. For example, when
Mrs. Gordon questions Leila about her marital situation, Leila ends up feeling “like a schoolgirl being chastised for turning up at games without her gym kit” (FP 191). Leila even compares them to the missionaries that came to their island during colonisation (FP 199).

While outwardly, these women feel “as though [they] had something to offer”, behind this exterior Leila reads both the seductresses of black men and the infatuation with a coloured skin. An obsession both on the subject of their own skins, as on that of black children, since Leila suspects Mrs. Gordon’s fascination with touching Calvin to be connected with reassuring his skin colour is real (FP 199). While in my interpretation these women are playing the role of “mothering in a human and colonial manner”, Goddard uses this phrase to introduce the part in his essay about A State of Independence (1986) in which he describes the role of both Bertram’s actual mother and that of the mother country (n.pag.). I would like to transplant his idea of “mothering in a human and colonial manner” to The Final Passage (1985) and In the Falling Snow (2009). While Leila’s mother never related to Leila and Leila thus never achieves some understanding of her mother, Leila equally finds no connection to the UK and fails to understand the mother country and its inhabitants. Moreover, her mother abandoned her to move to England, and now Leila is in England herself, she equally feels this country has abandoned her together with her mother and her husband. The only way she could possibly connect to this country is by giving in to the role assigned to her by both the country and the new mothers who present themselves to Leila: the Salvation Army woman, Mary and Mrs. Gordon. However, one could question whether being infantilised by a country and its inhabitants is really a valuable relationship? Equally, Brenda and England accepted Keith as their son, but only if he played the role they assigned to him: he had to play the proper Englishman under the maternal regime of integration.

This idea of being accepted only on terms of the role you play leads me to a second possible interpretation of In the Falling Snow’s (2009) title. In The European Tribe (1987) an
eponymous chapter is to be found narrating about Phillips’ stay in Norway. I have read this section as an experience for Phillips showing that even though he might think at a certain occasion that it does not matter that he is black, since he is a respectable man and he is able to pay for Club class on his flight, society, in this case the Norwegians, might slip and show their true colours, being full of distrust and racial bias towards a black man. Even then, however, society will tell him that if he acts as a gentleman, everything is fine, as is literally said by the chief who searched and interrogated him (ET 101). In the falling snow, while visiting the country, the same feeling comes upon him and is later on confirmed when he witnesses the Desmund Tutu Celebration after he received his Nobel Prize. Even though this respectable man was honoured on this occasion, the festivities had to conform to Norwegian norms. The sole performance which made Phillips believe there was still hope is when some Swedish schoolchildren and Desmond Tutu joined together in African folk songs (ET 105). Phillips ends this section with the idea that mutual respect should be the basis of every intercultural interaction instead of the colonising wish to impose a role of assimilation on the migrants being thus falsely ‘welcomed’ by these increasingly multicultural societies. As we have seen, the same can be said for Leila, and even for Keith, though his life is set in society twenty years later. Therefore ‘in the falling snow’ stands for the moment when one’s true colours step into the light, being it either the unmasking of society’s charade, Earl showing Keith that he cares about him or Leila realising that she misses some aspects of her island for which she deemed herself too good before, such as her friends Millie and Bradeth. Secondly, regarding Richard Wright’s poem at the beginning of this section in The European Tribe (1987) 38, ‘in the falling snow’ is also an expression of trying – but never fully achieving – to conform to an often assimilative role society has imposed on his migrants, but which does not

38 In the falling snow
A laughing boy holds out his palms
Until they are white.

Richard Wright
Quoted in The European Tribe (1987) page 100.
reflect a lot of mutual respect. The moment when Leila walks in the falling snow, she has
discarded all women who wanted to push her into the role of their personal charity case and
she stops caring about how she is presented to the outside world, openly having imaginative
conversations with her baby son on the street amidst people doing their Christmas shopping.

Besides the link which can be made with the interpretation of In the Falling Snow’s
(2009) title, The Final Passage (1985) obviously touched upon several aspects which have
appeared to be important in my analysis of In the Falling Snow (2009) as well: the
communicational problems between the generations, the distortion of history and society’s
appearance, the lack of someone to share your experiences with in an unwelcoming society,
some parallels in the storyline, and the roles that are imposed on migrants and which form the
condition on which they will be accepted. Nonetheless, a strong straight-forward connection
to the second generation still lacks in The Final Passage (1985) itself, even though parallels
could be found between The Final Passage (1985) and Keith’s second generation experiences.
This connection, however, might become clearer when regarding the film adaptation that has
been made of The Final Passage (1985) ten years after its publication. By taking a closer look
at the changes that have been made between the novel and its adaptation I hope to provide an
answer to what might have been Keith’s question about Phillips’ novel The Final Passage
(1985) as he equally wondered about his father’s first generation story: “Just what, if any,
connection do these people have to [my] own life, let alone that of Annabelle and Laurie?”
(IFS 285).
5.3 *The Final Passage*’s film adaptation (1996) as an Explanatory Bridge between *The Final Passage* (1985) and *In the Falling Snow* (2009)

Besides the obvious difference achieved by transmediation, the main differences between the novel and the television drama are to be found in the depiction of Michael’s experiences and a grown-up Calvin in the tv adaptation. These conscious changes emphasise the link that can be laid with the novel *In the Falling Snow* (2009) which was written more than ten years later. Although Barbara Korte and Claudia Sternberg depend a lot on the interview with Caryl Phillips by Maya Jaggi that took place during the shooting of the tv adaptation, interpretations can be made departing from the adaptation itself as well, such as Eva Ulrike Pirker did. But before we move on to her analysis as a basis for my further interpretation and comparison with *In the Falling Snow* (2009), the remarkability of the production of such a film which deals straightforwardly with black British history made in the nineties must be acknowledged. Admittedly, “[i]t is through this medium that it is possible to address both black and white mass audiences and thus achieve the mainstreaming of an awareness of the history of black migration to Britain”, since it was also screened on Channel 4 during primetime on a Sunday and Monday evening (Korte & Sternberg 199, original emphasis). Even though Pirker optimistically claims that “The Arts Council and other major, cultural, media, and broadcasting institutions have begun to implement strategies to help improve the representation of issues of interest in and from the visible communities of Britain” (269), Barbara Korte and Claudia Sternberg also strikingly observe “that the risk of producing television drama about the black and Asian experience is still not easily taken and most likely to be taken when the product is already ‘known’ as an approved cultural commodity” (203).

39 Barbara Korte & Claudia Sternberg and Eva Ulrike Pirker are the only two articles to be found explicitly on the tv adaptation of *The Final Passage* (1996).
Similarly, a film adaptation has been made of *Small Island* (2004) by Andrea Levy, equally a West Indian second generation writer, as a conscious choice of the BBC to start adapting novels concerning recent British history more often. Again, novels are used as a basis instead of ‘daring’ to start from scratch with a film about black British history. It is therefore even more remarkable that Phillips got the opportunity of Channel 4 already in 1996 with quite a notable budget even. Either way, a film adaptation can transcend the restrictiveness of an exclusive reading audience by the use of such a mass medium. Pirker states that it is exactly due to the use of the “format of the two-part television drama [that the novel] required conceptual concessions”, after which she continues to analyse one of the main differences between novel and adaptation (276):

Apart from the depiction of characters, the most striking deviations from the novel are the simplification of plot and structure. In each part of the television drama, framing ring compositions are used. The first part is embedded in a ring that describes Leila’s queuing up for the ship while Michael takes his time to turn up. [...] In contrast to the respective part in the novel, entitled ‘The End’, the frame in part one of the television drama does not end in a mixture of uncertainty and hopeful expectations, but literally as a dead end, an end to illusions about the new place. The tone alters in the second part. Here the frame structure employs scenes of the adult Calvin, who is driving through London to go and see his mother, determined to find more about his/their past (276).

The presence of a grown up Calvin may remind us of Keith, since outwardly he equally seems to have succeeded in life, since he is a lawyer with a decent suit comfortably driving his Volkswagen around in London, his hometown. Since Calvin received a letter from a woman saying that his father is seriously ill he confronts his mother with her previous story that his father went back to the West Indies. She therefore decides to explain how it was for her upon
arrival in England. When Calvin doubts she will tell the truth now, she tells him upfront that “soon there is not going to be any West Indians left who made the passage to England” which counts as a vow for telling him the truth this time. Obviously, this may also be an explanation for why Phillips chose to retell this story through a mass medium in the nineties. Moreover, this provides a more prominent role to the second generation who needs to hurry to open up the conversations with the first generation if they still want to find out their parents’ stories, as Keith has been wondering all his life. A parallel can be seen between Keith and Calvin, and Earl and Leila more clearly now. We have seen before that “[i]n the novel, the hopes that Leila projects onto her mother in quest for communication, understanding, and identity are explored in detail”, but even on her mother’s death bed she fails to open up the conversation, as Earl equally did not know what to say to his father the evening before his father’s death (Pirker 276). Equally, their parents kept their mouths tightly shut, which the first generation will change, though rather late in life, towards the second generation. After Calvin has received the letter on the subject of his father, “Calvin in the adaptation succeeds in his pursuit of answers”, as on Earls death bed, by means of his long-stretched conversation with Keith “communication replaces silence” (Pirker 277). An evident difference between the tv drama and In the Falling Snow (2009) can obviously be found in the absence of a third generation with whom Calvin in his turn might try to breach the lack of communication even sooner than his parents’ generation did. Another similarity which Calvin forefronts is the faulty idea that British society is one big success story of multiculturalisation nowadays. This impression may result because of the fact that “[i]n the ‘50s racism wasn’t as sophisticated as it sometimes can be now” (Harry 26). While contempt and racism will rather be concealed and conveyed in subtly covert ways “[b]ack in those days racists would look you in the eye and tell you to go back to your own country, as they do in the film” (Harry 26). Moreover, the fact that Calvin’s car has been vandalised, even though he looks like a decent English citizen,
may point to the fact that ‘all is not well’ concerning racial bias in the nineties, as it still fails to be in the contemporary setting of *In the Falling Snow* (2009). Moreover, though Leila seems to have upgraded herself to a middle-class terraced house, living comfortably after an early retirement, Michael’s shabby place and lack of money depicts another possibility as well. Interestingly, after Calvin has visited Michael he will find out that on a single occasion his father came to their house and brought him a present, which might slightly remind us of Keith’s thirteenth birthday when Earl suddenly arrived at their door to take him to the movies and take up his parental role. Like Keith, Calvin appears to have been struggling to come to terms with his absent father. In the television drama Michael acknowledges that he might have made a mistake on the subject of his paternal duties, even though “it is not too late”, which echoes Earl’s decision to seize the opportunity to confide to Keith that he did care about him, before it is too late. Obviously, the first generation had to endure difficulties on social level as well, probably enforced by the problems they had surviving in the hostile environment of the UK. However, their social insufficiencies have caused the second generation’s personal quandaries which they have been trying to straighten out almost all their lives. In other words, the former generation has a clear influence on the next, even if they are absent or remain distanced and silent. Besides the communicational problems and changes between the generations, and the distortion of history and society’s appearance as a one-sided success story, the paving the way of the first generation for there to be a possibility of a second generation is probably the most obvious theme in the relationship between Calvin and his parents. The final words in the tv adaptation were not in the novel, since it is the seriously aged Leila who speaks. She tells Calvin that she misses several things of her Caribbean island, still she does not wish to go back simply because she has Calvin:

> Whatever troubles I had in England, and I had plenty, England could never take you away from me. Maybe when you have children of your own, you’ll understand what I
mean when I say you’re the reason I survived. To take you back would have been to
take you back to what? This England is your home, and as long as it is your home, it is
my home too.

Here Leila explains why the first generation may choose to remain silent about the past,
besides the painfulness reminiscing might mean; for the sake of their children. Leila never
told Calvin that his father brought him a present, because she feared it might confuse him. It
was her child’s future, instead of her own past, which made her remain striving forward in the
present. The wish that her child would have the successful future she herself dreamed of when
coming to England, but failed to achieve for herself, is what made her decide to stay in
England, despite all the hardships she had to endure. If the first generation would not have
clenched their teeth and suffered the biased treatments they encountered upon arrival, there
would have never been a second generation which managed to climb up somewhat on the
social ladder. Obviously, not only the second generation needed to be reminded of this, but
the white audience tuning in on Channel 4 on a Sunday evening may need this explanation of
why West Indian people came to their country, with which expectations, what they had to
suffer and why they endured it, maybe even more. As always, Phillips tries to evoke a more
profound understanding of the first generation in general by depicting a specific personal
story which is as complex and diverse as the compilation of people of the first generation
itself was, “and it is this personal focus which makes it possible for a general audience to
relate to their stories beyond the ‘depersonalised’ historical knowledge which parts of the
audience may associate with the early phase of black post-war migration” (Korte & Sternberg
200). In other words, “what, if any, connection do these people have to [Keith’s or any second
generation migrant’s] own life” is made utterly clear in the television drama: not only is the
presence of a second generation possible thanks to the hardships the first generation endured,
they even endured it for them, their children for whom they wanted to have a brighter future than the reality they were presented with upon arrival in England (IFS 285).

Even though Phillips searches for understanding through the personal, a novel will always be able to provide a more personal account than a film, since in a novel you can be transplanted inside the character’s minds, while in a film the same characters can only express their thoughts through what is actually voiced. Everything they choose to keep silent therefore remains a secret to the audience. Leila’s isolation and desperation, for example, could not be as easily conveyed as in the novel, unless the scenes wherein Michael chooses his own path and which depict Leila as something he has easily discarded once he met the blond hairdresser Stella were actually shown to the audience. Therefore the scenes of Michael’s dwellings in London are added to the tv drama, which brings us to the second most prominent difference between the novel and the tv drama. While in the novel Michael simply disappears in the text, as he disappears from Leila’s life, in the tv adaptation the audience is able to follow his experiences in the UK as well. For example, after Michael has failed to find a job once again, he stays outside his girlfriend Stella’s hairdresser’s on the street in the falling snow. When Stella beckons him inside and asks him why he did not simply enter, he answers in a defeated voice that he could not find a job. This could coincide with my previous interpretation of in the falling snow as the moment wherein one’s true colours are revealed and when one fails to play the role that is assigned to someone. Michael could not manage to find a job to fit in the role of decent boyfriend who does not need to be dependent on his girlfriend for money, therefore he finally dares to show his own defeat and lose the self-confident arrogance that is so characteristic of Michael. Besides this scene ‘in the falling snow’ it is obviously mainly the frame structure in which an adult Calvin and his aged parents feature that links the story of the novel The Final Passage (1985) more explicitly with the second generation and thus with In the Falling Snow (2009).
Most obviously a parallel can be seen between Earl’s story in *In the Falling Snow* (2009) and *The Final Passage* (1985). Though some peculiarities are indeed characteristic of *The Final Passage* (1985), such as its female perspective, the treating of power in relation to sexuality, the different perspectives on the island and Millie and Bradeth as Leila and Michael’s foils, similarities with *In the Falling Snow* (2009) can be found as well. The title of *The Final Passage* (1985) may direct us to the relationship of Leila with her mother, such as in *In the Falling Snow* (2009) father-son relationships was one of the major features as well. Moreover, in both novels these themes are dealt with in relation to a failure of communication which is inherited from the previous generation and which will hopefully be breached in the future towards the next generations. Though this theme is not displayed in *The Final Passage* (1985), both novels appear to be motivated by a rectification of the distorting image that society presents, either by depicting the second generation as the enemy within or by wrongly giving the impression that racial bias has been overcome these days. Moreover, both Keith and Leila feel unwelcomed by a society in which they have no connection whatsoever to a West Indian community, which enforces their feeling of isolation and their incapability to share their thoughts and feelings. Besides, a parallel can be read in Leila and Earl as well, because of the severe disillusionments they had to suffer after arriving in a country which differed greatly from the Promised Land they had in mind. This theme brings us back to the topic of role-playing as well. Both Keith and Leila have been pushed inside a role which has functioned as a condition on which they would be accepted in the UK. Interestingly, through the eponymous section in *The European Tribe* (1987) a new reading of ‘in the falling snow’ can be made as the occasion on which one’s true colours appear and the attempt, though not necessarily the achievement, of trying to conform to an imposed role is emphasised. However, it is mainly through the tv drama *The Final Passage* (1996) that a strong link between *The
Final Passage (1985) and the second generation, and consequently between The Final Passage (1985) and In the Falling Snow (2009) becomes apparent. The main difference which conveys this clear link is the depiction of a grown-up second generation Calvin, which resembles Keith at several points, though once again other subtle similarities with In the Falling Snow (2009), such as the distorted image of society, can be found as well. Maybe even more important than Calvin are the final words added to the tv adaptaion as an explanation of why the first generation migrated and, even more importantly, clenched their teeth while bearing the prejudices they had to deal with on a daily basis, in order to survive for their children and their hopefully better futures. This first generation’s motivation needed to be explained in the politically heated times of The Final Passage’s (1985) publication, which may explain Phillips’ choice for a first generation story. Moreover, their motives for migrating and staying in the UK needed to be told even more urgently in 1996 to both a black and a white audience by means of a mass medium such as television at the moment that the first generation started disappearing. Apparently their motivation still needs to be retold in 2009 as well, when it is finally time for the second generation to take over the torch and further pave the way for the third generation.
6. **In the Falling Snow (2009): a Second Generation**

**Reassessment of Earlier Themes, Visions and Concerns**

The topicality of research on second generation’s work in today’s increasingly multicultural society may have become apparent through this analysis of Caryl Phillips’ work, which will hopefully encourage other critics to research more second generation postcolonial literary work, such as Andrea Levy’s. Since Phillips commenced writing as a second generation postcolonial author in a pioneering position, it might be interesting if more second generation work is known, in order to make a comparative analysis of different approaches. Other second generation writers may provide another vision on the contemporary friction existing between different ethnicities. Even though Phillips responds to this reality by promoting an overall understanding of a swamping cultural plurality on all levels in life, other writers may express another vision. Secondly, they could present other possibilities of dealing with their own identity and thus their status of a second generation writer. Phillips created a carefully polished myth, which, though plural, might contest the anti-reductive position for which he strives, as the context his writing should be positioned in. As I have shown, this myth appears to be fallible as well and may thus be transformed by other newly emerging second generation writers. Moreover, they may chose to deal with the second generation’s experiences more directly in their oeuvre. Phillips, however, only managed to lift the veil that was to be found on the issue of the second generation in his previous work in his latest novel *In the Falling Snow* (2009). Even though a lot of recurring themes in Phillips’ earlier novels are equally to be found in *In the Falling Snow* (2009), the application of these themes on a second generation peculiarity is innovative and a refreshing move away from Phillips’ historical and geographical threads. However, it must be acknowledged that a second generation residing in London is at the same time immensely indebted to this history of geographical expansion as
well, since without its history of, for example, the slave trade, a second generation would have never existed nowadays. Besides the generational interaction with the second generation as a focal point, two other main themes can be distilled in *In the Falling Snow* (2009): the failure of communication and the deceptive appearances linked to role-playing. Even though the generational theme is quite innovative in Phillips’ work, a slight echo of *The Final Passage* (1985) can already be found in the importance that is assigned to the first generation and the need to refresh their story in the collective memory, since if it was not for the first generation’s perseverance, there never would have been a second generation in the first place. The second theme, the failure of communication, is closely linked to a lot of other recurring themes in Phillips’ work such as problematic familial relationships. While in this section it became clear that these themes are a logical follow-through of Phillips’ preoccupations, these ideas are refreshed by the different angle they are tackled with through the peculiarity of Keith’s second generation fear of rejection. The same can be said for the third theme of role-playing and deceptive appearances. Through this analysis of *In the Falling Snow* (2009) it also became probable that the importance of the previous generations lies in the fact that they pave the way for the later generations and that important lessons can be learned from them, which will hopefully be further conducted in order to gain improvements considering the following generations. In other words, while Phillips may have been somewhat reductive in only dealing with the diaspora and the Middle Passage before, as López Ropero rightfully says (95), Phillips has impressively restored this restrictiveness now by also dealing with the outcome of a second generation presence and the generational interaction, and by tackling his favourite themes from this original angle as well. In other words *In the Falling Snow* (2009) appears to be both a reassessment and an inscription of the themes and visions in Phillips’ earlier work. Therefore critics and reviewer alike are wrong to discard Phillips latest novel and I argue for its revaluation as a worthy latest novel on Phillips’ bibliographical list.
Moreover, we have regarded *In the Falling Snow* (2009) in comparison with Phillips’ debut novel *The Final Passage* (1985) in order to argue that *In the Falling Snow* (2009) is only a logical consequence regarding Phillips’ themes and concerns that have been there since the very beginning. Besides the obvious parallels between Earl’s story in *In the Falling Snow* (2009) and *The Final Passage* (1985), *The Final Passage* (1985) bears some peculiarities as well. Besides, though this is not dealt with here, obviously Phillips has also developed in his style ever since his first novel, which is clearly remarkable in a comparison of both novels and which should be further investigated in the future. However, in our comparison of *The Final Passage* (1985) and *In the Falling Snow* (2009) the similarities which can be retraced between this first and latest novel in storyline, interpretation and motivation were more important to provide sufficient foundation for my argument. Some of the similarities between both novels are Phillips’ occupation with the disruption of the family unit, mother-daughter and father-son relationships, a failure of communication, being pushed in an assimilative role, etc. Through the tv adaptation, however, a more obvious and direct link will be made with the generational concerns: both the presence of a second generation Calvin and the explanation of the first generation’s motivation in paving the way for the following generations’ future are added. All three pieces of work together therefore emphasise the importance of remembering the first generation’s contributions, either in function of political debate, mutual humane understanding or handing over the torch to the second generation. Though not dealt with here, it might become even more interesting to compare *In the Falling Snow* (2009) further with two of Phillips’ earlier plays. Both *Strange Fruit* (1981) and *Where There is Darkness* (1982) deal with the intergenerational friction and peculiarities as well, as can be read in Ellis’ article “Caryl Phillips: Caribbean Conversations II.” Besides the presence of a second generation in these plays, material for further comparative research with the later novels is provided through these plays. Obviously, some recurrent themes, such as the failure of communication
and the importance of remembering the first generation’s experiences and roots, though they
do not easily convey their story, were already present in these early plays as well. Moreover,
Alvin, the youngest second generation son echoes the name of Calvin, Leila’s second
generation son. Besides, Alvin wants to become a social worker, as Keith is in In the Falling
Snow (2009). Interestingly Keith’s last name is Gordon, such as the social worker’s name in
The Final Passage (1985). In Strange Fruit (1981) conversation is made about the black
players entering the British football league, with a stress on Laurie Cunnigham, the football
player after which Keith and Annabelle named their son. Moreover, Errol, Alvin’s younger
brother, has an interracial relationship with Shelley, who appears to be pregnant. Even though
a parallel between Alvin and Keith, who both chose for the non-violent way of making a
change through social work, seems more obvious, a parallel between Keith and Errol,
supporting the Black Front, can be seen as well. Throughout the play it is said that Errol needs
to grow up and take up his responsibility, as Keith needed to realise as well. Moreover, both
Errol and Keith despise the “ugly little redneck [bastards]” such as Annabelle’s friend Bruce
(Strange Fruit 35). While Alvin represents the feeling that the second generation does not
belong in the Caribbean, nor in the UK, Errol represents the harsh reality of being mistreated
and needlessly arrested by the police force during the Thatcher years. Mother, on the other
hand, represents the first generation and narrates about the first time she “ever saw snow in
England” which exemplifies once more that even if one tries hard to assimilate to British
norms, they may still fail to be accepted by society in the end (Strange Fruit 49-52).
Moreover, British society’s true colours were revealed on this occasion, in contrast with the
moment of intense happiness which Mother imagined to experience when she would see snow
for the first time (Strange Fruit 52). Moreover, mother was adamant on the fact that her
children should acquire a decent education and find a proper job, since she has “worked
herself stupid to get [her children] where they are now”, in order that they could “stand up on
[their] own feet and rise up out of the gutter” (Strange Fruit 84). Everything she endured, she did it all for her children, as she exclaims to Alvin in a desperate attempt of explaining herself (Strange Fruit 86). However, Alvin fails to understand her and blames her for imposing “clichés for the white boy” such as “dress smartly” and “do up your tie” on her black sons (Strange Fruit 87). Moreover, he blames his mother for being “too busy playing white”, while at the same time he blames his brother Errol for being “too busy playing black” as well (Strange Fruit 88). Finally, the historical aspect is emphasised once more by Phillips in Strange Fruit (1981) by the statement that “the most important part of knowing where you’re going to is knowing where you’ve come from” (Strange Fruit 77). A phrase that could summarise Keith’s most important lesson learned throughout In the Falling Snow (2009) as well. Either way, In the Falling Snow (2009) is clearly linked to Phillips’ earlier work and the main question which remains is whether this generational thread will be continued in Phillips’ following work as well, be it more overtly after finally breaching his pattern with In the Falling Snow (2009) or way more covertly again as was the case before?
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