
CARYL PHILLIPS' *THE FINAL PASSAGE* AS A NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVE

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Abstract:

Caryl Phillips' novel 'The Final Passage' (1985) deals with neo-slavery. It is like Sam Selvon's novel 'The Lonely Londoners' (1956). Historically speaking the 'Middle Passage' refers to the slaves' journey from Africa towards the Americas. The term 'final passage' may mean either the passage from a small Caribbean island towards England, which the main characters in this novel undertake, or the passage from England to the Caribbean island, which the protagonist Leila Preston considers at the end of the novel. Both solutions are suggested for the story's end. There is a spiritual hint that it is the soul's journey to Godhead.

Key Words: *Spiritual, Soul's journey, neo-slavery.*

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In an interview that he gave to Maya Jaggi in 1996, Caryl Phillips states that “Immigration from former colonies has transformed Britain in the past fifty years. Caribbean migration has made a phenomenal impact” (Jaggi 157). The mass migration from the colonies to the English metropolis began with the arrival of Empire Windrush at Dover in 1948. It is estimated that over one hundred thousand people from the Caribbean migrated to England during the first decade after the Windrush.

Caryl Phillips's first novel, *The Final Passage*, is set in the 1950s. Its main protagonist is Leila Preston, a nineteen-year-old girl from the Caribbean who decides to migrate to England in order to start afresh. The novel is divided into five parts: The End, Home, England, The Passage and Winter. Each of them focuses on several aspects of Leila's life and the consequences of the decisions she makes.

The story begins as if Leila's 'end' in Carribbea. Hence, the first of the five sections is called 'End'. Laila describes how her husband Michael Preston is a failure in the native. She hopes to revive his life in London. She has a son called Calvin. Her mother seems to be in a hospital in London. As a mixed race woman she prides with her nearly white color. She is optimistic of starting her life afresh. There is a lot of description about how Leila and her friend Millie pack up suitcases for the journey. The two pack the things that are less and most essential. The author writes,

Leila's marriage to Michael is another source of frustration and distress for her. Their relationship is shaky from the onset and is a source of tension between Leila and her mother who warns her about Michael before their marriage: “the boy from Sandy Bay is no good. He loves himself too much and he will use you. He don't even have a job” (*Passage* 34).

Michael's treatment of Leila is even worse. He deserts her on their wedding day and returns to Beverly. He is not present when his son, Calvin, is born. When he makes up his mind to leave Beverly and

go back to his wife, he does it out of sheer selfishness not out of consideration for Calvin as Leila first believes.

It is in this socio-political background, Leila decides to migrate to England where at the time her mother was hospitalized. In the midst of packing Millie alluded to Leila's white father. Michael came there with his friend Bradeth that is Millie's husband. The two loaded the luggage. The ship started, providing tiny and fading view of the island. The section ends thus with a hope to see her mother.

The second section "Home" is nostalgic in a way. The author provides elaborate descriptions about the two pairs, that of Leila and Michael and Bradeth and Millie. This third section "England" is short with fourteen pages. Leila and Michael with their child reach London harbor. They stay somewhere near a hospital where her mother Mrs Franks is hospitalized. The author tells her story in low key. Leila notices a lot of black people in London. These people are multicultural one may say, speaking several languages. They belong to several ethnic cultures. Though they all look black they are not of one nation. What Leila notices is they are poor and suffering folks. In fact, she feels she too is one. The section ends with Leila's mother's funeral.

When it comes to the narrative technique, there is a backward glance. The section "England" had to be after "The Passage" (the IV section) actually. Shortly after they set in their new house, Michael turns into a visitor. He grows more and more distant. In the end, Leila and Michael become again the two strangers they had always been and instead of reviving, their marriage breaks for good: "Michael failed not only to see her but to speak to her. His mind, though obviously burdened, was something she was now denied access to...Her marriage was dead ...His footsteps became more distant, the echoing of his shoes lighter, missing first one beat and then another, until they finally faded altogether" (*Passage* 197-8).

Michael then leaves in a huff. He meets a white employer Jeffreys and finds a coolie job. He works with another black Edwin there. He joins a Caribbean Club. Michael decides that, if he wants to make a fresh start, he has to put his past and the Caribbean behind him. He starts a relationship with a blonde woman, presumably an English native, takes up a job and deserts Leila. Then there is Mrs Frank's death. The inheritance Leila had expected to receive upon her mother's death was not to be. It turned out her mother had spent what funds she had on bringing them to England.

Gradually Leila's friendship with the Irish woman Mary fades. Mary neglects Leila, or she had an interest in Michael, who had a white woman as company. Leila's mulato colour was not favoured too. Finally, Laila left England for St Patricks in the Carribbea. Critics like Siti Nur Hamidan feel that Phillips's novel *The Final Passage* contrasts England with that of the Caribbean.

Works-Cited:

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