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2019

History, Slavery, and the Phantom in Alice Thompson's Pharos

Linda Tym
Southern Adventist University, lindatym@southern.edu

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History, Slavery, and The Phantom in Alice Thompson's *Pharos*

Three years after the Scottish Parliament was re-established, reviews of Alice Thompson's

Pharos, published in 2002, only whispered of the novel's conjuration of Scotland's

involvement in the slave trade. In *The Herald*, Laurence Wareing remarked that books can tell

'tales to explain big ideas' and made a cursory reference to 'the secret of the keeper's guilty

past'; however, Wareing neither identified the 'big ideas' nor exposed 'the secret'.[1] Similarly,

in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Roz Kaveney alluded to 'a slave-ship', but failed to trace

its origins and, instead, retreated to a discussion of the novel's style and characters.[2]

Collectively, reviews openly admired Thompson's prose style and consistently referred to the

novel's unusual form and ephemeral characters, but avoided any extended analysis of its

thematic and historical complexity. Of six reviews, only Lesley McDowell's in *The Sunday*

Herald directed attention to the 'slavery theme near the novel's heart' and noted that the

central character Lucia was 'a ghost, the evil spirit of a slave ship'.[3] The omission of the

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[1] Laurence Wareing, 'Magical Mystery Tour Wanders into a Dream-Like Allegory', *HeraldScotland*, 15 June 2002.

[2] Roz Kaveney, 'Pharos by Thomson, Alice (Author)', in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 02 August 2002, p. 20, in *The Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive* <http://find.galegroup.com/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=ed_itw&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200510137&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 18 March 2012].

[3] Lesley McDowell, 'Ghost Writer; the Idea for Her Latest Novel Came to Alice Thompson', *Sunday Herald*, 26 May 2002 <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4156/is_20020526/ai_n12577254> [accessed 16 May 2008]. See also: 'Through a Glass Darkly', *Scotsman*, 7 June 2002 < http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/books/through-a-glass-darkly-1-570296> [accessed 29 January 2015]; '*Pharos*: A Ghost Story', *Kirkus Review*, 15 July 2003, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/alice-thompson/pharos/> [accessed 29 January 2015]; Isobel

novel's primary theme from literary discussions not only exposed a lack of awareness of the extent of Scotland's involvement in the slave trade, but also hinted to a fear that the resurrection of the spectre of slavery would stain the nation's future. By 2007, the bicentennial of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, Scotland's involvement in the slave trade was openly discussed. Both political and academic spheres were compelled to historical revelation: the Scottish Government distributed a pamphlet on *Scotland and the Slave Trade* and the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* published a special issue, 'Caribbean-Scottish Passages'.[4] In the Scottish context, slavery had shifted into position as a publically acknowledged episode in the nation's history.

Scotland's involvement in the slave trade frames the narrative of Alice Thompson's third novel. Alice Thompson's work has been studied often for its literary allusions and gothic themes; however, *Pharos* is Thompson's first story erected within a particular historical and

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Montgomery, 'Saturday Review: Fiction: *Pharos*, by Alice Thompson (Virago, pounds 6.99)', *Guardian*, 21 December 2002, <https://ezproxy.southern.edu:444/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA95655223&v=2.1&u=tel_a_sau&it=r&p=PPPM&sw=w&asid=0eefce357bbd092e6df59bf25ad9a984> [accessed 29 January 2015]; and Christina Hardyment, 'Books, Fish and Ships; Christina Hardyment Takes to the Hammock with a Summer Flotilla of Nautical Novels', *Independent*, 3 August 2002, p. 21 <https://ezproxy.southern.edu:444/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA90160295&v=2.1&u=tel_a_sau&it=r&p=PPPM&sw=w&asid=80f1252448ddd9f6e05378f4666f7922> [accessed 29 January 2015].

[4] Scholarship, such as the special issue 'Caribbean-Scottish Passages' in *International Journal of Scottish Literature* (2008), for example, addresses this paradox. As Gemma Robinson and Carla Sassi remark: 'The endemic nature as well as the striking proportions of this 'amnesia' can be partly related to Scotland's own problematical quest for a national identity in the modern age'. See also Michael Morris' 'Joseph Knight: Scotland and the Black Atlantic', in the same issue, for analysis of a literary examination of slavery. For an article with a wider, popular readership see Jackie Kay, 'Missing Faces', *Guardian*, 24 March 2007, <http://gu.com/p/xj22v/sbl> [accessed 17 January 2015].

geographical Scottish context.[5] The characters are inscribed with memory not just of their own history, but also of their national past. Within the novel, the transferral of familial memory signals the need to examine the disrupted and hidden past and to readdress the gaps within historical narratives. By broaching the subject of human trafficking and locating the narrative within a Scottish setting, *Pharos* interrogates Scotland's participation in the slave trade. In this essay, I explore Thompson's use of historical and linguistic traces. Referring to Nicolas Abraham's theory of the transgenerational phantom, I position *Pharos* within its geographical and historical context to demonstrate that the island setting is a site where the exploration of personal, psychological elements of memory within a transgenerational context enable the interrogation of fractures within Scottish history. The figure of Lucia in the novel, I argue, embodies not only the disgraceful personal past of characters within the text, but also points to the shameful national history of Scotland's participation in the British slave trade. The transferral of transgenerational familial memory within the text demonstrates the need to examine the disrupted and hidden past, not to reinvent, but to readdress it.

The Transgenerational Phantom

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[5] See Sarah Dunnigan, 'Alice Thompson's Gothic Metamorphoses the Allusive Languages of Myth, Fairy Tale and Monstrosity in the Falconer', *Gothic Studies*, 13.2 (2011), 49-62; Monica Germanà, *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction since 1978* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Monica Germanà, 'Real Gorgons or Fantastic Chimeras? Re-Shaping Myth and Tradition: Alice Thompson's Justine', *esharp*, 1 (2003), <http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/esharp/issues/1/germana/> [accessed 16 July 2008]; and Carol Anderson, 'Emma Tennant, Elspeth Barker, Alice Thompson: Gothic Revisited', in *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*. ed. by Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 117-30.

To address the spectre of slavery, I turn to psychoanalysis, which is often used in the field of memory studies.[6] As it calls for the re-examination of historical narratives, memory studies often draws attention to the past experiences of the individual. The emphasis that psychoanalysis places upon both spoken language and unspoken behaviour highlights problematic memory and its effects. The inability or refusal to remember is singularly significant and is often expressed in linguistic gaps and silences, which may point to problematic memory and highlight its effect on personal and national histories. Nicolas Abraham's concept of the phantom extends the study of the unconscious beyond an individual's present and explores the phantom in the context of a larger community: his study of the phantom is particularly valuable in the study of transgenerational memory.[7]

In his essay 'Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology', Abraham expands the focus of psychoanalysis beyond the individual's psyche. Abraham's concept of the transgenerational phantom traces the effects of an undisclosed past beyond the individual and within the familial and national communities. His theory investigates what happens when the psychic disturbances in an individual's memory are never expressed and remain secret. The phantom is the delayed manifestation of an individual's undisclosed and unacknowledged unconscious. An individual's unconscious contains shameful secrets of the past that are hidden and unspoken, yet later erupt to haunt future generations, who are unaware of this disgraceful past. According to Abraham, the phantom extends across

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[6] For example, Gabrielle Schwab, Julian Wolfreys, and Esther Rashkin each use psychoanalysis in diverse research on the Holocaust, Victorian studies, and familial narratives. For a thorough investigation of these theories, see Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[7] Abraham's study of the phantom was part of his extensive research collaboration with Maria Torok. See Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Nicholas T. Rand. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

generations because 'some people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestors' lives', which affects others 'adversely and unconsciously'.[8] Abraham compares 'the foreign presence to ventriloquism and calls it a "phantom," a "haunting," or a "phantomatic haunting"'.[9] This memory is not rejuvenating or liberating; a memory that is another's returns to oppress the unconscious of an unsuspecting individual.

Abraham sketches the primary aspects of the phantom and it is useful to chart its function here. As a manifestation of the past, the phantom points to an unspeakable gap in the psyche of the dead and disturbs the present individual, who is unaware of this secret past. Because the transmission of these shameful memories is unconscious, the phantom cannot be recognized by the individual – it hovers and haunts.[10] Despite the lack of awareness, an individual may have an aversion to revealing a family secret or transgressing familial integrity. The phantom counteracts the healthy mourning process, for the words that invoke the presence of the phantom 'point to a gap, they refer to the unspeakable'.[11] Silent and repetitive, the phantom operates through secreted words; however, it is not a repressed experience. The individual *is not* aware of the phantom because it 'eludes rationalization' and is unknown: '*The phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other*'.[12] Although the phantom 'has no energy of its own', it 'gives rise to endless repetition and . . . eludes rationalization'.[13] The phantom is fuelled by words, which 'return to haunt from the unconscious. These are often the very words that rule an entire family's

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[8] Abraham and Torok, p. 166.

[9] Abraham and Torok, p. 166.

[10] Abraham and Torok, p. 174.

[11] Abraham and Torok, p. 174.

[12] Abraham and Torok, p. 175 – emphasis original.

[13] Abraham and Torok, p. 175.

history and function as the tokens of its pitiable articulations'.[14] Abraham insists, however,

that the family's history can be changed. The phantom may be exorcised and may decrease

through the generations. Abraham speculates that the 'phantom effect' may eventually

disappear and that hope may lie in the attempt 'to relieve the unconscious by placing the

effects of the phantom in the social realm'.[15] Although a haunting presence, the phantom need

not be a permanent blight on the future: if acknowledged, the phantomic effect can be

mitigated.

The Isolated Island

The setting, characters, and plot of Thompson's *Pharos* offer a site for the investigation of the

phantomic effect and its ensuing implications in the social realm. The rural setting of the

novel and the solitary, scripted life of lighthouse keepers who live on Jacob's Rock, a small

island twenty-seven miles from the west coast of Scotland, is seemingly far from the social

realm. The location of the island is central to the novel – a map of it is provided for the reader

before the narrative begins. Like 'The Merry Men' and other island narratives of R. L.

Stevenson,[16] *Pharos* offers an increasingly disruptive and psychologically complex

representation of history as an exploration of the past and the inclusion of a map, for

Thompson, serves as an 'homage to […] *Treasure Island*'.[17] The map highlights the external

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[14] Abraham and Torok, p. 176.

[15] Abraham and Torok, p. 176.

[16] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Merry Men', *The Scottish Stories and Essays*, ed. by Kenneth Gelder,

(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 99-141.

[17] Alice Thompson, 'Personal Interview', 12 February 2009. This interview appears in Linda D. Tym, 'Forms of

Memory in Late Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Scottish Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University

of Edinburgh, 2011), pp. 211-226.

physical boundaries and emphasizes the internal perimeters of memory; it also implies the invitation and guidance to visit and to discover a space that has been previously experienced and explored.[18]

In 'Discourses of the Island', Gillian Beer establishes the importance of the island as a form of space wherein to situate narratives: 'The double nature of the island – both a fragmentary upheaving of land from below the surface and a complete and autonomous form – is part of its imaginative attraction and makes it possible to play many nature/culture variations within its zone'.[19] Often noted as a useful object of study, the island is seen as 'simpler than a continent or an ocean, a visibly discrete object that can be labelled with a name and its resident populations identified'.[20] Despite its apparently simple and concrete structure, an island is also soluble. As shards of rock are worn into pebbles by the persistent battery of the waves, the boundaries of the island are perpetually in flux as its soil disintegrates into the sea, thus both the idea of water and earth are 'intrinsic to the word' island.[21] Comingling with the saltwater, sediment is deposited far from its original eroded landmass; therefore, an island is both geographically limited and yet open. A defined topographical circumference, an island space is accessible; its setting is 'both total and

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[18] Interestingly, *NLV Pharos* is the name of Northern Lighthouse Board's ship specifically designated to care for lighthouses along the coast of Scotland. In addition to these references, Robert Louis Stevenson was the grandson of Robert Stevenson (1772-1850), the builder of the Bell Rock lighthouse among other Scottish lighthouses.

[19] Gillian Beer, 'Discourses of the Island', in *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression*, ed. by Frederick Amrine, (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), pp. 1-27 (p. 13).

[20] Robert Helmer MacArthur and Edward O. Wilson, *The Theory of Island Biogeography*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 3.

[21] Beer, p. 16.

local'.[22] The appeal of a limited geographical space that is simultaneously expansive and accessible lends itself to fiction, where an island setting serves as a miniature space wherein debates of historical and national concern may occur, yet remain moderately distanced. Spatially limited, the island contains a fixed number of inhabitants, who are not only within a restricted location, but also have reduced means of entry and exit.

Jacob's Rock is set apart from the mainland and has a lighthouse, which warns mariners of the dangers that surround the perimeter of the island. Peril, however, is also contained within the island. The narrative not only identifies the dangers and barriers to the investigation of this space, but also invites and encourages the exploration of the undisclosed, problematic past. Although it is spatially distant from the Scottish mainland, Thompson's use of an island establishes the narrative within the wider context of historical events. The story of *Pharos* positions Jacob's Rock as a site not only of the local island's past, but also of the total Scottish history. The location postures as a miniaturized version of Britain. Using the island setting, Thompson articulates the elisions within Scottish history and writes into *Pharos* a direct engagement with the repressed aspects of Scotland's role in the British empire. In constructing this fictitious island that is set apart from the mainland, Thompson conjures a representation of the unspoken, shameful history that Scotland has attempted to disown: the phantom of slavery. In the liminal space between day and night, an eerie rapping, 'very specific and loud', erupting from the centre of the lighthouse demands the attention of the central character.[23] There, Lucia discovers a map of the world in the service room that depicts 'a trade route from the west coast of Scotland to Jacob's Rock, twenty-seven miles off the coast, down to the west coast of Africa, across to the West Indies and then back to Jacob's

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[22] Beer, p. 21.

[23] Alice Thompson, *Pharos* (London: Virago, 2002), p. 41.

Rock'.[24] Although Lucia fails to recognise the correlation between the persistent rapping and the map, it reminds the reader of the shadow that slavery has cast upon Scotland's past. The map explicitly identifies the island as simultaneously 'total and local'.[25] The geographical mapping of the slave route not only unmasks the slave trade that occurred within the local borders of the island, but also exposes the human trafficking within the wider, global community. The curse of the slave trade, however, not only haunts the text: it is a figure that hovers in Scotland's history.

Slavery in Scotland and *Pharos*

The impossibility of escaping the history of slavery figures prominently in the novel. Labelled as 'a ghost story' on its cover, *Pharos* hovers on the boundary of reality and fantasy, where the horrific traces of enslavement provide the realistic background to a fantastical tale. The novel's title, *Pharos*, is eerily familiar, simultaneously evoking the luminescence of Alexandrian knowledge and alluding to the shrouded history of the Egyptian empire – an empire erected, in part, by slavery.[26] Although the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807 served to reduce the slave trade, it was not until the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act that slavery became illegal and the law was actively enforced in Britain. Thompson historically situates the narrative in 1826: the slave trade is illegal, but slavery has not yet been abolished. A spectre is said to haunt the island, although '"[n]o one has seen the ghost clearly, its sex, age or race. But it is said that the ghost is the curse of the slave ship that went down ten years

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[24] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 41.

[25] Beer, p. 21.

[26] The allusion also recalls the Alexandrian lighthouse built for Ptolemy II of Egypt on the island of Pharos in the fourth century BC as well as the meaning of 'lamp' or 'candelabrum' ('Pharos'). See Exodus 1.6-14 for an account of the Hebrews' enslavement.

ago off Jacob's Rock, with all the slaves, women, men and children, on board''".[27] The

relationship between the island and slavery, however, is not simply unfounded information.

As one character describes it, a

> British galley was carrying slaves illegally from Africa to the Caribbean
>
> plantations. The naval patrols had chased them badly off course. The ship hit the
>
> reef. All the slaves drowned. They went down with the ship, still manacled to
>
> their seats. The body of one female slave was washed up on the beach.[28]

The liaison between the isolated lighthouse and the mainland is deliberately explicit. In an

interview for *The Sunday Herald*, Alice Thompson insists on the relevance of integrating

history into narratives of fantasy: 'Places like Glasgow and Leith were founded on slavery',

she says.

> It's partly why I wanted to use the motif of the ghost story – to explore how slavery
>
> haunts us, the legacy of our responsibility in what happened. I also liked the idea of
>
> setting it on an island, to use an island as a place of escape but it's never possible to
>
> escape completely from history.[29]

Thompson not only positions the narrative within a particular historical era, but also employs

elements of the fantastic to engage with darker, more psychological elements of shameful

history – both of an individual and of a nation. Thompson openly admits that these elements

are intertwined in her writing. She explains,

> slavery haunts *Pharos*. [A] country is not just made up of its rocks and its trees.
>
> And while you can acknowledge their beauty, I think one also has to – it's
>
> interesting and to see the historical context of the landscape as well. [. . .] I think

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[27] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 63.

[28] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 46.

[29] McDowell.

the history comes out of the landscape. [. . .] It's an interesting idea also, I suppose, this idea of escaping history and the idea that you come to the landscape is a place of escape, but actually you carry that history with you and the beauty is transcendent. But there's also a side to the landscape that is marked and no matter how isolated you are.[30]

Despite its isolated location, the phantom of history marks Jacob's Rock. The island is a direct reminder of the enslavement of colonized peoples during colonial expansion, which was embraced by Scotland.

Like the silence of the novel's reviewers, a similar suppression of Scotland's involvement in slavery was evident in academic discussions prior to the bicentennial.[31] Scottish historical accounts are haunted by the unexplained gaps in the explanation of Scotland's participation in the empire and the slave trade; gaps that are evident even in twentieth-century accounts of the British empire's history. The complexities of Scotland's historio-political position within Great Britain and the British empire are well documented. Subsumed into the larger national structure of Great Britain, Scotland's incorporation into this collective political entity permitted it to become an active participant in the British empire's colonization of the globe. Scotland's role in Great Britain's colonial project, however, is paradoxical. Scotland is portrayed alternatively as a victim of the colonial enterprise or as a perpetrator of the imperial project. Like Scotland's role in British imperialism, historical

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[30] Thompson, 'Interview', p. 217.

[31] Studies that address Scotland's racial politics include: B. Cant and E. Kelly, 'Why is there a need for racial equality activity in Scotland?', *Scottish Affairs*, 12 (1995), 9-26; Cairns Craig, 'Scotland and Hybridity', in *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie, and Alastair Renfrew (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 229-253. Later publications, such as *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, ed. by David Dabydeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), among others, seek to fill previous academic omissions.

accounts have often diminished Scotland's participation in the slave trade, perhaps due to the paradox of Scotland's significant role in the colonization and expansion of the British empire. The discrepancies are further exposed in the discussion of Scotland's role in the empire and participation in the slave trade. The unusual position as a dominated, 'lesser' nation that, in turn, has oppressed and displaced other cultures is a problematic aspect of Scottish history and it involved both urban and rural centres. Despite Glasgow's position as a port for the west coast of Britain, T. M. Devine and Gordon Jackson's extensive study of the city's history is silent on its involvement in human trafficking.[32] Strangely, Devine's discussion of the tobacco trade centres on economics, but fails to mention the slaves, the primary labourers who made the enormous financial gains possible. It was not until 2003 that Devine acknowledged this historical omission. In *Scotland's Empire, 1600-1815*, he observes that little scholarship in Scottish studies has focused on slavery and cites *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (2001) as having only one reference in the index to the West Indies. Indignantly, Devine explains,

> [t]here is no index entry to 'slavery' and the single 'slave trade' reference is
> exclusively concerned with the campaigns of the Scottish missionary societies in
> the nineteenth century against the immoral commerce in human beings. The
> omission is surprising because, as will become apparent, the role of the Scots in
> the British Caribbean was deeply significant. The transience of the Scottish
> presence, which left little cultural trace compared with the long-term impact of the

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[32] T. M. Devine and Gordon Jackson's extensive volume, *Glasgow Volume 1: Beginnings to 1830*, does not include references to the slave trade: the index lacks entries to 'Africa', 'slavery', and 'anti-slavery'. The index to *Glasgow. Vol. 1, Beginnings to 1830* does include an entry for 'emancipation'; however, the citation refers to Scottish coal miners, not slaves. See T. M. Devine, 'The Golden Age of Tobacco', in *Glasgow. Vol. 1, Beginnings to 1830*, ed. by T.M. Devine and Gordon Jackson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 139-83.

Scots in North America, may be one explanation for the neglect. Another may be that economic historians in particular have been bewitched by the extraordinary success story of Scottish merchants in the Chesapeake tobacco trade and have marginalized other key aspects of transatlantic commerce. The darker side of Scottish business in the slave economies could also have caused them to have been overlooked in the past.[33]

It appears that a mere eight years earlier Devine, too, had been bewitched by the economic achievements of the Scottish tobacco trade. The repetitive elisions within historical examinations of Scotland's role in the slave trade are clearly demonstrated in the writing and editing of prominent Scottish historians.

Unlike the historians, Cairns Craig approaches the colonial project and its ensuing effects differently. He argues that '[e]ntry into the hell of history, or the entry of a hellish history upon one's historyless world' dominates narrative paradigms of Scottish literature.[34] According to Craig, the nation's literature is constantly seeking to elevate itself from the 'trivially local' into a dialogue with 'the meta-narrative of History itself'; the Scottish novel is divided between a 'historyless reality'[35] and a 'hellish history'.[36] The only escape, he maintains, is to either 'go through history to whatever conclusion it may bring, or one has to find an alternative'.[37] Although Craig's argument offers only binary divisions, it calls for an additional space where narratives of the past can be revisited and re-examined.

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[33] T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp. 226-227.

[34] Cairns Craig, *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 50.

[35] Craig, p. 51.

[36] Craig, p. 50.

[37] Craig, p. 51.

Scotland is burdened with the history of colonial slavery, yet has engaged in a collective act of forgetting. The failure to confront Scottish participation in the empire's slave trade painted a blot on its past, an unacknowledged spectre that haunted generations. Although Scotland's participation in slavery had been largely eliminated from historical accounts, it remained a figure that erupted in literary accounts. At the turn of the millennium, writers such as Alice Thompson, Jackie Kay, and James Robertson challenged the assumption of the divide between the historyless and the hellish past; instead, through confrontation of the spectre of slavery, they sought to exorcise its presence.[38] As Thompson remarked, 'The history of the Scottish slave trade is something that's, really, not been talked about. [. . .] In the reviews of the book, very few of them mentioned the theme of slavery. And that is just – to me – so weird. Because it was the whole theme of the book, and yet they didn't really talk about it'.[39]

The Phantom in *Pharos*

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[38] See James Robertson, *Joseph Knight* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003). The narrative of *Joseph Knight* expands the late eighteenth-century story of the Jamaican slave who successfully fought a court battle for his freedom against his Scottish owner John Wedderburn. Robertson's historical realist fiction sketches the interiorised dilemmas of the characters as they negotiate issues of slavery, race, and freedom. The relationship between master and slave is revealed to be complex as it shifts between that of authority and friendship. In addition to Thompson and Robertson, authors such as Luke Sutherland, Leila Aboulela, Irvine Welsh, and Jackie Kay explored issues of contemporary racial politics and the latent implications of slavery within Scotland. See: Leila Aboulela, *The Translator* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999); Jackie Kay, *Off Colour* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1998); Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998); Luke Sutherland, *Jelly Roll* (London: Anchor, 1998); and Irvine Welsh, *Marabou Stork Nightmares: A Novel* (London: Cape, 1995).

[39] Thompson, 'Interview', p. 214.

While the nineteenth-century island location maps the temporal and geographical setting of the novel, the characters' relationships shift throughout the narrative. The island setting in *Pharos* not only creates a securely defined territory, but also ensures an artificially limited population, thus providing an effective site for the examination of the topography of transgenerational familial memory. Although the characters are Scottish, *Pharos* is not a re-enactment of the Scottish past; however, repressed historical elements haunt the interiority of the characters' memory. Instead, the distance from the Scottish mainland permits the investigation of problematic aspects of the nation's history. Within the liminal space between the binary categories of reality/imagination and history/fantasy, Thompson reworks concepts of memory to allow for an engagement with the unconscious past and to address the gaps in established and accepted versions of history. While the external mapping of Jacob's Rock is crucial to the story, it is within this island that the geography of family becomes of essential importance as it is mapped in the unusual geography of the text.[40] The novel, itself, is one continuous narrative, defying traditional allocations of chapter divisions and only separated by paragraph indentations. Likewise, the traditional genetic structures that define a family are blurred, depicting a unique interrogation of transgenerational memory and exposing the phantom as the unconscious transmission of a shameful past. There are five main characters: Cameron, in his mid-sixties, has been the lighthouse keeper for years; Simon, in his mid-twenties, was a farmer and is now the lighthouse keeper trainee; Charlotte, Cameron's sister, who visits the island to help with housekeeping; Lucia, an amnesiac woman, who is rescued from the sea; and Grace, a wandering child. The family unit does not consist of the typical nuclear family of father, mother, and children; rather, it is an artificially constructed family.

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[40] The island setting and complex familial relationships in *Pharos* are reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, which also centres on family dynamics and an island. See Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927).

Parental roles are filled by Cameron and his sister Charlotte. Simon is the surrogate child, while Lucia and Grace fill liminal familial roles. This family is defined not by genetics, but is verbally verified when Charlotte declares to Lucia, '"Cameron and Simon are my family. [. . .] And you are too, now. [. . .] It is as if we are a complete family"'.[41]

Although the novel disrupts traditional genetic structures, the characters are patterned after long-established familial narratives. The depiction of Cameron and Simon alludes to the Biblical brothers Cain and Abel, who, true to the competitive nature of siblings, vie for God's blessing. Cain, the eldest, gives the first fruits of his garden as an offering to God; Abel, the second, offers an unblemished lamb. God's acceptance of the lamb and rejection of the fruit sparks a rivalry between the brothers. In anger, Cain kills Abel, committing the first murder.[42] This story is paralleled and subverted in the novel. Cameron is the older, wiser, yet more traditionally religious man; Simon is the younger, inexperienced animist, who is physically connected to nature. Simon is 'all surface and instinct' and indulges in the 'pagan worship of nature'.[43] Cameron will often 'watch Simon tend his garden, come back dirty and exalted, arms brimming with cauliflowers, turnips and potatoes, and think he looked like he had been dug up from the earth too. That he had burst up from the ground covered in dirt, born of the earth'.[44] The relationship between the men is complex, for Cameron acts as both father and brother to Simon. Like the God of Genesis, who formed Adam from the dust of the ground, so Cameron adopts the stance of a distanced creator and paternal figure towards Simon. Cameron has 'a fondness for Simon too, so he restrained his judgement of him and treated him like a child who knew no better'.[45] However, just as Cain was marked for his sin of

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[41] Thompson, *Pharos*, pp. 54-55.

[42] See Genesis 4.

[43] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 40.

[44] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 40.

[45] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 40.

murder and his descendants were separated from the rest of humanity, it is Cameron's 'sin', or his secretive participation in the slave trade, that haunts Simon and the other inhabitants of the island.

Despite including echoes of Scotland's direct involvement in the slave trade, Thompson does not focus on the guilt of the nation; rather, she foregrounds the smear of slavery on personal culpability. The lighthouse keeper's participation in the trade ten years earlier haunts the present. Although Cameron claims that the female slave had been washed ashore dead, she had, in fact, survived – only to be raped, to bear the child Grace, and then to die. When Grace was still young, Cameron banished her from the lighthouse and she now forages the island to survive, segregated from the rest of the 'family'. Linda Colley suggests that slaves 'existed overwhelmingly outside Britain's own geographical and mental boundaries. [. . .] Most Britons still lived and died without encountering anyone whose skin colour was different from their own'.[46] Just as slaves were cast outwith the imagined boundaries of the nation, so Grace is cast beyond the familial territory. Once Cameron rejects her, she is no longer permitted inside the lighthouse and instead, finds security in the island's crypt. However, just as Cameron cannot rid himself of the reminder of his guilt and involvement in slavery and rape, so the horrors of slavery seep beyond the limitations of time. Although Grace has not experienced slavery, she becomes the transgenerational vessel for her mother's experience. Through voodoo incantations and trances, Grace transmits her mother's story of passage on the slave ships.[47]

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[46] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 355.

[47] In the descriptions of both Grace and Lucia, Thompson echoes the character of Antoinette Mason in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a revised account of Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette is Creole, a white woman born and naturalized in the West Indies. Like Grace, Antoinette is neither a European, nor a slave: she exists outwith the bounds of an acknowledged communal and racial narrative. While Cameron refuses to acknowledge Grace as part of his family, Rochester similarly rejects his marriage to Antoinette and impounds

In stark contrast to the alienation of Grace, a genetically related child, Lucia is subsumed into the family structure. Initially, she is referred to as 'the woman' as it is clear she has 'lost her memory'.[48] Only after the locket she wears is opened to reveal a small galleon *Lucia*, is the woman named. Like Cameron, the island cannot be rid of its guilt: the land itself is tainted. When she emerges onto the shoreline, where the land intersects with the sea, Lucia becomes a haunting reminder to those who attempted to bury the remains of slavery in the water. The sea, the maternal womb, gives birth to the phantomic presence of Lucia. Like a drowned, bloated body, the dark, repressed elements of Scotland's history surface in the novel's unconscious. Although her identity is clearly articulated by the end of the novel – she is the figure-head of the slave ship, animated by Simon's magical touch when he rescues her from the sea – Lucia does not hold the complete memories of her former existence.[49]

If a location is not one's own or one's home, then it is not imbued with personal memory: the memories held within the space are Other. Jacob's Rock is only an adopted home and the familial bond is formed because the inhabitants share a lack of personal and individual memory. Lucia has no memory and the narrative pivots on her attempt to remember; however, she is not the only character who is separated from the past. Like Lucia, it is 'as if Charlotte didn't have a memory either', for she 'never talked about her past'.[50] The

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her within his mansion. Like Lucia, Antoinette becomes a shade that haunts (inter)textual and geographical space of narrative and nation, a perpetual reminder of a white patriarch's personal and familial culpability. See Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, (London: André Deutsch, 1966).

[48] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 18.

[49] As a ship's figure-head, Lucia may be a further indication of Thompson's acknowledged debt to R. L. Stevenson. In *Ebb Tide* (1894), a ship's figure-head features prominently on the slaver Attwater's island, providing yet another link between Scottish island narratives and slavery. See Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Ebb Tide: A Trio & Quartette*, (London: Heinemann, 1894).

[50] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 54.

sense of familial identity is grounded in the loss of the past, in Charlotte's reminder to Lucia that they are a family. Charlotte insists, "'[w]e will be loath to let you go. Sometimes I don't want your memory to come back at all'".[51] The characters do not disclose stories of their pasts; instead, their experience centres entirely on their daily routine of keeping the lighthouse. Just as a community inhabits an identifiable geographical space, memory has an identifiable topographical space that may be shared within a family. In the novel, however, personal memory is seen as a possession that segregates. An individual's memory causes detachment from the other members of the family community; hence, is a danger to the collective familial unit.[52]

Because '[e]verything on Jacob's Rock seemed to be about the lighthouse, its past and its present, and the lighthouse had dominated, obliterated her [Lucia's] own history. She needed a history'.[53] Lucia's history, however, is Cameron's. He never speaks 'about his family or past and never invited questions about them either. She knew nothing about his history, his background or who he was'.[54] His omission is her existence. To her, time is

> in black and white. Black was her past and white her present. Black was what she had
> forgotten and white was the experience of life. And she longed for the shadows of
> things remembered, of being haunted by memories, by the ghosts of her previous
> life.[55]

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[51] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 55.

[52] Jackie Kay's poetry collection *Off Colour* examines familial and social segregation due to racism and slavery. For example, in 'Race, Racist, Racism', the subjugation of a slave is conjured: 'Lick the whip round my thick lips'. In 'Hottentot Venus', the commodification of a woman's flesh strips her value to a sum of individual body parts. See Jackie Kay, *Off Colour*, pp. 21-23, pp. 25-26 (p. 21).

[53] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 79.

[54] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 109.

[55] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 38.

Her lack of memory is insinuated as the result of both a deliberate act – it is 'mislaid' – and an event over which she has no control, for Lucia provides a tangible representation of the phantom.[56] As the embodiment of another's secretive and haunted past, her memory *is* outwith her control. Lucia can only be defined in relation to Cameron's history: she is 'possessed' by Cameron.[57] Lucia recognises her liminality, she is

> in the middle trying to recover my own character, which seems tenuous and amorphous; not mine yet. I want to fight off the invasions of these other characters, whose qualities are surreptitiously seeping into my own consciousness. I am powerless over their secret desires.[58]

Although the phantom points to an unspeakable gap, it may operate through secreted words: language allows the translation of an indefinable and inadmissible past. Language frames memory. It is through language that thoughts are articulated and in the moment of verbal or physical articulation, the thought passes and is fixed within the mind – it is already a memory. Grace's presence is never acknowledged by Cameron or Charlotte, but Lucia often sees Grace on the island. Unsure of the little girl's identity, Lucia tries to explain the sightings of Grace to the others, but they dismiss the stories as inventions of Lucia's imagination.

On this island, the only sense of security is found in reliance on the guidance of others. Lucia is unable to trust her own memory – since she has none – yet she is also unsure if she can trust her companions on the island. Following an encounter with Simon and Grace, Lucia is certain that '[e]ither Simon had played one of his tricks on her or her imagination was misleading her again. This inability to trust herself, she thought, or what she saw with her

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[56] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 38.

[57] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 90.

[58] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 70.

own eyes, made the world frighteningly indeterminate'.[59] The direct correlation between the
unreliability and instability of memory and the world causes an odd juxtaposition: if one
cannot rely on memory and the past to connect that moment to the present and cause a stable
sense of self, then there is no consistency to maintain that sense of self in relation to an
external whole.

Because her adoptive family refuse to believe the oral relation of her experiences,
Lucia creates an imaginary, but tangible record of her past. One dark night, Simon creeps into
her room to give her 'a blank book'.[60] Lucia is outraged and tears the pages into pieces: 'She
felt as she tore that it was herself she was ripping up, tearing into tiny pieces'.[61] However,
soon afterwards Lucia begins to write imaginary memories about the slave ship onto the blank
pages, hoping that the physical inscription of language on paper will validate the intangibility
of past experience. It is 'the ritual of human beings, to order their worlds, to make sense of
chaos, with the position of a pen'.[62] Titling the first page of the book '*The Book of False
Memories*', Lucia's entries are written in the present tense; even the inscription of language
cannot intrude upon the past – it cannot inscribe a memory on a past that has not existed.[63]

Returning to Craig's discussion of Scotland and its role within history, he suggests
that the alternative confrontation of history is one where

> [t]he historyless in this context is no longer the primitive (though it has the cyclic
> qualities of the primitive) and it is no longer simply a suspension of narrative
> (though it is beyond narration): it is a condition in which the historical, with its
> determined trajectory towards the future, is seen as a deformation; it is a

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[59] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 60.

[60] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 65.

[61] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 65.

[62] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 67.

[63] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 71.

consciousness in which the cyclic is no longer an oppressive repetition but a revelation of a fundamental pattern that releases the individual from the constraints of temporality.[64]

While *Pharos* does not present itself as a metaphor for Scottish history as a whole, the figure of Lucia as the phantom, who carries the unspoken memories of another into future generations, demonstrates one alternative to a 'historyless' condition. Her presence, rather than a cyclical, 'oppressive repetition', ensures the possibility that past guilt may be released. In the novel, there is an unusual positioning between the physical articulation of language through the act of writing and the intangible process of memory. Lucia finds comfort in detachment from the physical world:

> Bodies rotted and faded away, broken like pieces of wood, or grew flatulent like decaying blossoms. Lucia felt safer in the realms of the mind than in the confines of the body. Thoughts relieved her. She would slip into them like a child into a mountain pool, the coldness of her liquid ideas easing the heat of the day. As soon as she became aware of her body she started to sink, to gasp for breath. Her body would be the end of her. A recognition of her body was a recognition of death. And she was not prepared for an ending.[65]

Although Lucia does not want 'an ending', she realizes two things: that she must 'invent' her memories to 'get away'[66] and that she 'cannot live for much longer in this gossamer world of tenuous relationships between shadowy figures where I am the most ghost-like of them all'.[67] Her life, however, is not her own. Just as a map both delineates and points to a location, Lucia – the light – has a dual role: her presence elucidates the past and illuminates the future. It is

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[64] Craig, pp. 51-52.

[65] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 95.

[66] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 112.

[67] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 113.

not only Lucia, who writes herself into existence, but also Cameron. She is the embodiment of his unspeakable guilt – the phantom buried within his unconscious.[68] In his logbook, he notes that '[a]s the woman regains her memory I will recognize who she is. I already think I know who she is. It will be as if her memory is forming her face anew, writing her past on it for me to read in detail'.[69] As Lucia continues to write, she feels 'possessed, as if in a trance. She suddenly felt a nameless fear, as if someone else was in the room beside her, watching her write, actually causing the words to flow'.[70] Attempting to free herself of this past that is not hers, Lucia throws the book out her bedroom window and it floats through the air 'like a dead white bird, an albatross', settles on the water and miraculously, it is found and returned to her the next morning.[71] Like the Ancient Mariner's albatross – that emblem of guilt and shame – *The Book of False Memories* refuses to release Lucia.

As the narrative climaxes, Cameron becomes both blind and insane. He is no longer able to articulate himself through writing: '[m]ore often than not he was overwhelmed by the desire *not* to say something. For him, it was inarticulacy which was absolute'.[72] As his thoughts become increasingly convoluted, he relies upon Lucia to transcribe his rants. Cameron's guilt is secreted through language and his shameful memories influence the generations: his adamant refusal to acknowledge his shameful past results not only in the

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[68] In Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares*, Roy Strang, like Cameron, sexually assaults a woman, Kristy. Overcome with guilt, Roy dissociates himself from his family and fiancée. Following an accident, Roy is hospitalised and hallucinates memories of his South African childhood, where he was molested by his uncle and became acclimatised to the Apartheid and racism. Like a revenant, Kristy visits Roy in hospital and performs a penectomy as retribution for her rape.

[69] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 68.

[70] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 107.

[71] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 107.

[72] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 135 – emphasis original.

murder of his sister, but also in his own demise. After several weeks, the District Superintendent discovers Cameron, blind and naked, surrounded by pages of notes pinned to the wall, 'a giant depiction of his life with the meaning taken out: no narrative, no analysis, no thought. Just excerpts'.[73] Simon and Grace, whom Lucia locked up to keep safe from Cameron, are rescued and taken to the mainland, but the story continues. Lucia's shadowy figure remains on the island. The 'recognition of death' and the 'ending' that Lucia has feared is *not* her own: it *cannot* be her own, for the phantom remains to haunt future generations.[74] It is only 'an ending' – not identified with a pronoun or defined by a noun.

Alice Thompson's *Pharos* reveals the ways in which unconscious memory is transferred between generations. Using Abraham's concept of the transgenerational phantom, I examined the ways in which Lucia is the embodiment of the unacknowledged connection between the island and slavery. The island setting not only provides a discrete space to investigate the transgenerational phantom, but also gestures towards undisclosed aspects of Scottish history, particularly the scarcely acknowledged Scottish role in the British slave trade. The ambiguous ending of *Pharos* illustrates the phantomic operations of history: like Lucia's haunting presence on the island of Jacob's Rock, which serves as a reminder of Cameron's personal guilt, historical records of the slave trade prompt reflections on Scotland's past. According to Abraham, however, it is in the acknowledgement of the secretive past in the social realm wherein the 'oppressive repetition' of history can be halted.[75] Just as Simon and Grace are released from Lucia's haunting presence, so the transferral of memory across generations may be personalised, internalised, and readdressed.

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[73] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 147.

[74] Thompson, *Pharos*, p. 95.

[75] Craig, p. 52.