Caryl Phillips has maintained that a 'migratory condition, and the subsequent sense of displacement, can be a gift to the creative mind' (*A New World Order* [2002]). Examine the extent to which two twenty-first-century novelists capitalise on this connection between migration (or displacement) and artistic creativity.

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The contrapuntal nature of displacement literature renders it ambivalent and difficult to theorise. This essay aims to explore the complex interface between literature and displacement using tropes of mobility as a theoretical basis in order to question notions of identity construct and cultural belonging in Phillip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2005) and Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* (2010).

Displacement literature provides a plurality of vision which demonstrates an awareness of multiple dimensions designed to reflect the fundamentally 'discontinuous state of being'.[1] It gestures towards the conceptualisation of an indeterminate and dualistic sense of self constructed 'from the affective experience of social marginality, from the disjunctive, fragmented, displaced agency, and from the perspective of the edge'.[2] Through narrative exploration of the complexities of belonging, displacement literature strives to articulate the fissured nature of displaced consciousness and diasporic existence. It forces confrontation amongst the effects of instability resulting from migratory circumstances whilst simultaneously harbouring the potential for abstract, aesthetic reform through literature; 'Space here is hybrid, shifting, and reflective of the elaborate relationships that construct our sense of place in the contemporary world'.[3] The construction of an 'imaginary landscape'[4] or in-between realm constitutes this necessary bridge between the lived realities of migration and the emergence of a critical discourse that legitimises migration as a trope. Metaphors of mobility have become ubiquitous in theoretical discourses, drawing attention to the question of what constitutes identifiable human solidarity alongside unified, individualistic identity within the modern world. Alluding to the exilic nature of displacement, metaphor demonstrates this ability to cross frontiers and boundaries through the migration of ideas into images. Although the extent of their applicability is contestable, such tropes of mobility can offer profound insight into the condition of displacement by providing sound critical perspectives through which to interpret issues of belonging in literary texts.

Without detracting from the devastating reality that drives displacement literature, the imaginative possibilities involved in reconstructing fragmented experience through narrative subjectivity suggest that detachment encompasses 'the necessary precondition of all original thought'.[5] Whilst displacement derives from known experience, it also seeks to extract 'from

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[1] Edward Said, *Reflections on exile and other essays* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2000) p.177
[2] Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) p.1
[3] Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009) p.15
[4] Cristina Dascalu, *Imaginary homelands of writers in exile: Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee and V.S.Naipul* (New York: Cambria Press, 2007) p.34
[5] Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) p.81

the limits of its movement, from the experience of transit, a surplus, an excess, leading to an unforeseen and unknown possibility'.[6] Imaginative power and artistic creativity appear to emanate from the boundaries of accumulated experience and disaffection as a state of mind, generating narrative energy out of these tensions and oppositions. In seeking to recreate the effect of statelessness associated with discontinuous existence through literature, displacement assumes a privileged position capable of legitimising individual points of view; 'When detachment is the precondition for creativity, then disaffection or alienation as states of mind becomes a rite of passage for the "serious" modern artist or writer'.[7] Both *The Human Stain* and *In the Falling Snow* are novels structured around displaced perspectives resulting from the affective experience of cultural uprooting and detachment. Both articulate a sense of peripheral existence and fractured consciousness, as if within a transitory space or perpetual state of reformation and negotiation, in dramatising this search for an identifiable sense of belonging and fixed identity which transcends the constraints of ethnicity. Through the liberating possibilities of imaginative flight, displacement literature 'offers a narrow psychic space through which radical transformation may occur'.[8] The discursive nature of literature opens up historical dialogues through retrospect, enabling the 'antagonistic energies of the past to transform themselves, in the present, into a creation of syncretism'.[9] Fragmented experience can be imaginatively reworked into an overarching plurality of vision capable of looking in several directions at once. What appears to be irretrievably lost can be recaptured by the imagination, transforming 'the figure of rupture back into a "figure of connection"'.[10] In the same way that displacement literature functions as a form of 'recompense for the loss and uncertainty of the modern condition'[11] which evidences the possibility for transformation, these novels appear to endorse the power of fiction to 'slip the restrictive noose of race'[12] in embracing cultural hybridity. Both narratives seem to suggest that articulation of an outsider voice through otherness can occur within both the novel and the wider literary landscape, by positively and productively engaging with displacement in an attempt to pose moral challenges.

Arguably, this investment in literature's enabling capacity in many ways constitutes the driving force behind an emphasis on displacement. However, aesthetic recompense cannot be substituted as a means of resolving the affliction generated by the realities of cultural uprooting and experience of dislocation. Despite their investment in the literary, both Roth and Phillips recognise that any emotional reparation which occurs within these narratives takes place within an ideological construct, through the creation of 'an ahistorical space – aesthetics – which functions only in a very limited and specialised sense'.[13] As the authentic experience of displacement on the validated periphery intersects with the inauthentic unreality of literature, the extent to which these two twenty-first-century novelists are able to capitalise on this connection between displacement and artistic creativity becomes restricted. Nevertheless, imaginative literature remains one of the most profoundly influential ways in which displaced perceptions can be expressed and marginalised experience encoded, through its ability to reflect 'complex and ambiguous realities that make it a far more plausible representation of human feelings and understandings'.[14] By both expressing and encoding displaced consciousness through literature, such discourses of marginality 'intersect

[6] Ian Chambers, *Migrancy, culture and identity* (Oxon: Routledge, 1994) p.10
[7] Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: postmodern discourses of displacement* (USA: Duke University Press, 1996) p.36
[8] Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin (eds) *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 2002) p.34
[9] Ibid., p.148
[10] Seidel, p.ix
[11] Kaplan, p.38
[12] Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2001) p.131
[13] Kaplan, p.39
[14] King, Connell, White (eds) *Writing Across Worlds: literature and migration* (London: Routledge, 1995) p.15

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in a view of reality which supersedes the geometric distinction of centre and margin and replaces it with a sense of the complex, interweaving, and syncretic accretion of experience'.[15] In this sense, the displaced condition can be viewed as a paradigm for narrative strategy; 'for narrative performs not only as an experiential rival but as an aesthetic substitute or supplement. Exilic imagining in this sense is both the mirror and the "other" of narrative process; mimesis becomes an alien (or allegorical) phenomenon that establishes fictional sovereignty on fictional ground'.[16] Within this displaced aesthetic, writing functions as an expression of the impossibility of inhabiting such as stateless condition. The narrative becomes a site of 'mediation and subversion'[17] which stages the search for a sense of cultural belonging. However, even within an ideological construct, 'writing accrues power as a social practice if it can transmit authority and credibility'.[18] In using tropes of mobility to question notions of identity construct and cultural belonging within discourses of displacement which remain attuned to their complexity and diversity, both Roth and Phillips pose theoretical challenges to literary tradition by opening up the terms of the debate on canonicity to minority discourses. Literature's capacity for reformation through the imaginative reworking of displaced consciousness is therefore integral to the extent to which these novelists are able to capitalise on the connection between displacement and artistic creativity within these narratives, and in ways which transcend the boundaries of the printed page.

In terms of identity construct, it is *The Human Stain* which most poignantly captures this sense of disunity and subsequent existentialist engagement with the self. Within the novel, Roth dramatises the dynamic interplay of secrecy and self-transformation located in Coleman's endeavour to confront ethnic identity on his own terms; 'All he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white – just on his own and free'[19]. Based on the supposition that individual freedom resides outside the restrictive boundaries and narrow confines of race, the novel foregrounds the claim to an identity which refuses to be socially constructed; 'The objective was for his fate to be determined not by the ignorant, hate-filled intentions of a hostile world but, to whatever degree humanly possible, by his own resolve' (p.121). As an act of social defiance rather than cultural betrayal, Coleman simply chooses to exploit another social possibility that his complexion allows in suppressing his African-American cultural heritage and re-inventing himself as white and Jewish. Through Coleman, Roth articulates the need to conceptualise identity as both contingent and indeterminate in order to ascertain what constitutes human identity and whether emancipation from race and transcendence of cultural origins can ultimately lead to the creation of an authentic existence and durable sense of belonging.

Roth engages with displacement and otherness by pursuing textual moments designed to question "the sliding relationship with everything" (p.108) that constitutes the thematic basis for the novel. The most eloquent expression of this liberating slipperiness manifests itself within the fundamental moment of Coleman's identity recognition and reversal which occurs accidentally when his boxing coach advises him to conceal the fact he is black; 'If nothing comes up... you don't bring it up. You're neither one thing or the other. You're Silky Silk. That's enough' (p.98). Adept at counterpunching and 'rolling with the punch' (p.96), these supple qualities both enable Coleman to 'slip the bonds of racial ascription and become an invisible black man'[20] and bind the secret to his identity as a boxer. Silence becomes the

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[15] Ashcroft, p.103
[16] Seidel, p.198-9
[17] Brinker-Gabler and Smith (eds), *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe* (USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) p.63
[18] Kaplan, p.41
[19] Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (London: Vintage, 2005) p.120. All further references shall be made to this edition
[20] Ross Posnock, *Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity* (USA: Princeton University Press, 2006) p.194

key to his identity and truth of his psychological, singular sense of self, as possession of 'the *gift* to be secretive again' (p.135) fuels his smooth and seamless transition from black to white. Fear of losing control over self-mastery separates him from his family, 'but more fundamentally, it separates him from the historical conditions and opportunities that made his choice both possible, and, as he saw it, desirable in the first place'.[21] However, written as a first-person narrative from the subjective perspective of Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's use of free indirect discourse questions the authenticity and provisionality of constructed identity and displaced consciousness from the outset, 'It was enough to feel the thrill of leading a double life' (p.47). Ironically, the unreliable narrator's self-appointed role in reclaiming the complex identities of his protagonists by ascribing motives to their actions ultimately reveals them to be largely constructs of his own imagination; 'what sublimely earthly mischief! If ever there was a perfect one-of-a-kind creation—and hadn't singularity been his most inmost ego-driven ambition all along?' (p.131). The imaginative power of self-invention simultaneously constitutes Coleman's only defence and ultimate downfall, as the novel expresses 'a kind of alienation that is enlivened and exacerbated by what binds it'.[22]

Comparatively, *In the Falling Snow* constructs an entire narrative based on the affective experience of inhabiting displacement through racial heritage. Discontinuous retrospect forms the main thematic and structural thread of the novel, as Phillips gestures towards psychological realism in exploring the complexities of belonging through one individual perspective, 'It is painfully clear that, as far as some people are concerned, he simply doesn't belong in this part of the city'.[23] Following his enforced leave from work, Keith assumes a dislocated state of existence and detached consciousness which reflects the indeterminate unfolding of events shaped around his senseless cognitive meandering within the novel, 'His mind revisits the problems of work, and the policy report on trans-racial adoption that his department is supposed to produce by the end of the week' (p.40). A sense of peripheral existence is expressed through the emphasis on exposition and descriptive detail designed to evoke an atmosphere of lifelessness and monotony, 'The water in the kettle started to make a slow, steamy gurgle, and as the mist began to rise the light... passed through the vaporous cloud and created a strangely ethereal pattern' (p.20). Through Keith, Phillips therefore strives to articulate a deliberately partial and fractured view of a displaced figure in order to question what it might mean to channel universal concerns surrounding ethnic identity through an individual, subjective mindset.

Phillips's subtle treatment of race is linked to a question of sincerity which resists the temptation to romanticise the marginalised figure in an inherently virtuous way. Dictated by Keith's consciousness, odd temporal shifts crack the realist frame of the narrative, creating an unsettling sense of estranged and fragmented existence designed to undermine an established picture of multiculturalism; 'His generation of kids, who were born in Britain and who had no memory of any kind of tropical life before England, were clearly trying hard to make a space for themselves in a not always welcoming country' (p.41). Experimentation with the discontinuities of time results in the disruption of conventional narrative order, reflecting Phillips's own condition as a disrupter 'of national continuity'.[24] Similarly, the constant shifting between recollections and events creates an impression of claustrophobic confinement and displaced agency, 'life had long begun to fade into the general mélange of hazy childhood memories' (p.18). Separated from his wife, distanced from his son and

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[21] Timothy Parrish, 'Ralph Ellison: The Invisible Man in Philip Roth's "The Human Stain"', *Contemporary Literature,* Vol. 45, No.3, Autumn 2004, p.441

[22] Robert Greenberg, 'Transgression in the fiction of Philip Roth', 1997 in *Philip Roth* by Harold Bloom (USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003) p.96

[23] Caryl Phillips, *In the Falling Snow* (London: Vintage, 2010) p.3 All further references shall be made to this edition

[24] Phillips, *A New World Order*, p.292

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estranged by his father, Keith embraces the diasporic existence and estranged nature of his cultural heritage in rejecting the possibility of a self-determined history which escapes the intolerance of others; 'You see the asylum-seekers, and those migrants from the subcontinent who come here to marry their cousins, they have every right to be here no matter how hard some of us may find it to accept them' (p.50).

    Within these narratives, both Roth and Phillips interrogate what constitutes an identifiable sense of belonging and to what extent the complex interrelationship between ethnic identity and cultural belonging can be resolved within aesthetic recompense, through literature. *The Human Stain* constitutes an attempt to deterritorialise cultural belonging through self-invention and an investment in assimilation to whiteness, 'Why would things happen as they do and history read as it does if inherent to existence was something called normalcy?' (p.130). Through Coleman, Roth endeavours to shift the restrictive boundaries of historical-political significance which form coherent meaning and deconstruct established cultural formations to reassert legitimate belonging on individualistic grounds; 'Taking on the ersatz prestige of an aggressively thinking, self analytic, irreverent American Jew reveling in the ironies of the marginal Manhattan existence turned out to be nothing like so reckless as it might have seemed' (p.131). Advocating cultural hybridity as opposed to cultural authenticity, Coleman immerses himself in a 'passionate struggle for singularity' and effective sense of agency which aspires to freedom through indeterminate selfhood rather than human solidarity; 'He was Coleman, the greatest of the great *pioneers* of the I' (p.108).

    As race emerges at the forefront of this tension between displacement and negotiation of difference, attainment of freedom means sacrificing the ethnic history both represented and embodied in his family, 'But only through this test can he be the man he has chosen to be, unalterably separated from what he was handed at birth, free to struggle at being free' (p.139). Interwoven with wider historical events that serve to question cultural morality and self-righteousness, Coleman situates his sense of affiliation to modern America, in the same way as Clinton, within 'the elixir of the secret' (p.135). Whilst he succeeds in evading historical circumstance by relinquishing his attachments to cultural origin, not even the transformative powers of the ideological construct can 'reframe his personal loss as narrative triumph' through literature [25]. Forever marked by this universal burden of the human stain, it is his humanity rather than race which subverts any possibility of pure freedom, 'It's in everyone. Indwelling. Inherent. Defining. The stain that is there before its mark' (p.242). In an attempt to transcribe feelings of displacement and detachment outside the confines of the narrative, Roth suggests that this experience is 'one we all share as humans who are fatally stained, and one to which we are all vulnerable'.[26]

    Similarly, *In the Falling Snow* articulates an acute expression of dislocation invoked through an inherited sense of detached outlook which contests the absolute and essentialist notions of cultural belonging. Despite being born and raised in Britain, Keith inherits the affective experience of social marginalisation from the migrant condition of his father through race, 'Despite the cold, the dark glasses make him feel more comfortable on these streets, for he is able to look at people without them being able to see his eyes (p.3). Constantly assuming an outsider perspective within his own narrative surroundings, Keith encompasses the peripheral and fragmented vision of otherness in a melancholy world, 'He peers through the window at the low horizon, which is ragged with rusting fire escapes and abandoned buildings, as the train passes quickly through the desolate parts of the city' (p.14). Focalising introspection through retrospect, Phillips' continual use of flashbacks punctuates the present tense narrative, suggesting that Keith occupies a perpetual state of detachment, as if in a transitory space or moment in time, through relentless negotiation between past and

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[25] Parrish, p.423
[26] Ibid., p.457

present, '"You look like you're drifting off again." Annabelle claps her hands. "Hello, anybody there?"' (p.223).

Consequently, while his father succeeds in evoking an identifiable homeland through the re-imagined perceptions of temporality and spatiality, Keith expresses complete disengagement with cultural solidarity through his inability to conceptualise any real place to call home, 'So where do you think we should have brought him up? The West Indies, your imaginary homeland?' (p.219). The generational aspect of the novel gives authentic voice to the experience of displacement, simultaneously preventing Keith from moving across these existing frontiers and cutting across fixed allegiances, 'Are these really her opinions? "Our type of people"?' (p.161). Whilst *The Human Stain* endorses the concept of provisional freedom through self-invention and human singularity, *In the Falling Snow* gestures towards the difficulties of transcending an inherited and discontinuous state of being resulting from intergenerational migratory circumstances. Despite this, both novels succeed in articulating an astute sense of peripheral existence and fractured consciousness in dramatising this search for a sense of belonging and fixed identity. Similarly, striving to ascertain precisely what constitutes an identifiable sense of belonging and to what extent the tensions between ethnic identity and cultural belonging can be resolved through aesthetic recompense and narrative exploration, remains highly complex. Through imaginative reworking and abstraction of the lived realities of migration, both Roth and Phillips successfully engage with and renew the historical past, refiguring it as a contingent, in-between space of innovation and creativity. However, the extent to which these articulations of displacement can pose moral challenges capable of transcending the boundaries of the printed page, is restricted through their limited abilities to generate insight into how to negotiate these devastating realities of displacement resulting from migratory circumstances.

Nonetheless, in employing tropes of mobility to question concepts of identity construct and cultural belonging in *The Human Stain* and *In the Falling Snow,* both Roth and Phillips evidence the capacity of fiction to explore the complex interface between literature and displacement. By examining lived experience, these novelists therefore succeed in reconceptualising and re-evaluating notions of displacement and migration, contributing invaluably to the understanding of literature in bringing this investigation into the complexities of belonging to the fore.

Examine the extent to which two twenty-first-century novelists capitalise
on this connection between migration (or displacement) and artistic creativity.

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