

Zadie Smith

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The paper aims to investigate Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. *White Teeth* is the first novel of the contemporary female writer Zadie Smith, giving her a quintessential overnight position among the greats of British literature. The paper focuses on the overall context of contemporary Anglo-American post colonial literature, personal and social identities can be creatively cross examined by using the material and cultural symbolism of tooth. This paper proposes that Zadie Smith successfully employs the metaphor of teeth to convey about a character's heritage and roots. It examines the entangled effects the cultural history can have on one's identity. The core of this paper is the analysis of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*, its language and the overall multicultural context. The paper includes the thematic aspects of the novel *White Teeth* mixed marriages, skin colour, nurture of children from mixed families and different ethnic groups and its focus on the language and situational humour within the novel *White Teeth*.

keywords: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, post-colonial, postmodernism, hybridity, ethnicity

White Teeth is the first novel of young London novelist Zadie Smith, following the lives of members within two unique families. Archie Jones, patriarch of one family, is an indecisive man on the brink of suicide when he finds true love for the first time and begins a new life with his Jamaican bride. Samad Iqbal is Archie's good friend, head of a family of second-generation immigrants who fail to understand their father's obsession with the traditions of the past. Both men struggle not only with raising their children, but also with dealing with strong wives who hold opinions of their own. *White Teeth* explores the dysfunction within all families with humour and humility. Throughout the novel, teeth symbolize people. Teeth are white no matter what a person's race, making them a universal symbol of humanity. By the same token, they are enduring and preserved in the skull long after we die. Therefore, teeth leave a particularly long legacy and connect people throughout time. The actions of specific teeth represent the way we experience life. For example, canines are "the ripping teeth" involved in an initial bite. In a positive sense, they allow us to experience the sensuous things life offers, while in a negative sense, they are a predator's teeth and thus are threatening. Alsana likens the Chalfens' influence on Millat and Irie to the Chalfens ripping the children apart, destroying the qualities in them that are important to their own parents. Molars are the grinding teeth, which help us digest our food. Metaphorically, they help us process the information we take in and turn it into our own actions. In the chapter entitled "Molars," Magid and Millat catch Samad with Poppy as they bite into apples with their white teeth. Here, Smith uses molars to reflect that the twins "digest" their father's actions and are therefore destined to follow in his footsteps.

Archie sits in his car, determined to kill himself due to a bad divorce, until the owner of a nearby butcher urges him to move on. Archie sees this man as a symbol that life has re-embraced him and he decides to live. Archie goes for a drive and finds himself at the home of a young man who had thrown a large New Year's Eve party. Archie thought this might be a place where he could begin a new life, so when he meets Clara Bowden it seems like fate. Within a few months the couple is married. Shortly after the wedding, Archie moves Clara into a house a few blocks away from the home of his good friend Samad Iqbal. Clara and Samad's wife, Alsana, become good friends over the next few months when they become pregnant at the same time.

After the birth of his twin boys, Samad becomes the ideal father, immersing himself in the politics of their school. However, in doing so, Samad finds himself becoming obsessed with a young teacher at the school. Due to the restrictions of his religion, Samad is tortured with guilt over his obsession with this young woman and comes to realize that his own sons will come to suffer even greater than he has from the temptations of the Western world due to their lack of exposure to their home land and its traditions.

Samad decides the only way to protect his children from this downfall is to send them home. However, Samad cannot afford to send both boys, so he is forced to choose between them. Samad sends the elder of the two boys in secret, incurring the wrath of his wife.

Several years pass while the children grow older. Magid, the eldest Iqbal son, embraces the culture of Bangladesh, raising his father's hopes that he might join the church. Millat, Magid's twin, is the opposite, getting into trouble constantly. Archie's daughter, Irie, is intelligent and obedient, but so deeply in love with Millat that trouble seems to follow her every move. At 16, Irie and Millat get caught up in a drug raid at their school and as a punishment are sent to study with a fellow student in his home.

The Chalfens, whose names are Joyce and Marcus, welcome Millat and Irie into their family. Joyce, a gardening expert, takes Millat under her wing as though he is one of her own sons in need of guidance. Marcus, a scientist, welcomes Irie's organizational skills and gives her a job working in his office. Clara and Alsana are not happy with their children's new family, feeling pushed out of their own roles. When Marcus begins to correspond with Magid, tensions grow to a boiling point. Against Samad's wishes, Marcus encourages Magid to become a lawyer and pays to bring him back to England. While happy to see their son again, Samad and Alsana are outraged at Marcus and Joyce's presumptuous involvement in their children's lives. Alsana and Joyce battle over Millat while Clara attempts to set down some ground rules with Irie. Both confrontations backfire, encouraging yet more rebellious behavior in their children.

During this time, Marcus has been working in genetics on mice. One of his mice is due to be put on public display. Many organizations become upset about this mouse, believing that Marcus's work is an example of cruelty to animals. One of these groups is KEVIN, an organization of which Millat is a part. Both families converge on the ceremonies opening this display to support Irie and Magid in their work with Marcus. During the ceremonies, Millat pulls a gun to kill Marcus in order to make a statement against animal cruelty. However, recognizing Millat's intentions, Archie jumps in front of the gun and takes a bullet in his leg. Luckily Millat receives a light sentence and the families continue to live in happy dysfunction.

Often, teeth cause trouble, such as when Clara's upper teeth are knocked out of her mouth, or when Magid and Millat catch Samad with Poppy. Furthermore, teeth are easily lost. When Clara loses her upper teeth in the scooter accident, she simultaneously is rejecting the Jehovah's Witnesses and thus losing part of her identity. In the violence following Indira Ghandi's death, we are told that in the streets of India, there are "teeth, teeth everywhere, scattered throughout the land, mingling with the dust." As the people of India lose themselves to violence and intolerance, they knock out each other's teeth, forgetting that teeth unite human beings, and are common to all.

Smith uses the term "root canal" to describe the examination of someone's past. Even though teeth are universal, they are nothing without their roots. Samad tries to send Magid back to his Bengali roots, but as the narrator mocks: "You would get nowhere telling [Samad]... that the first sign of tooth decay is something rotten, something degenerate, deep within the gums. Roots were what saved, the ropes one throws out to rescue drowning me, to Save their Souls." By salvaging a tooth's root, as in a root canal, one does not necessarily save the tooth. Indeed, even sending Magid back to Bangladesh does not prevent him from becoming an English intellectual.

Irie is the character perhaps most frustrated by roots. She despises how the past and cultural heritage complicate and restrict the present. Therefore, she feels particularly deceived when she discovers Clara's upper teeth are false. Clara's false teeth are rootless, representing her lack of connection to her heritage. Therefore, in order to find her roots, Irie seeks out Hortense. In light of Clara's frustration with roots, it is fitting that she resolves to become a dentist. In Smith's metaphor, teeth are people. Therefore a dentist mends relationships between people and keeps them healthy. This paper investigate the post-colonial concepts of identifying the novel the white teeth zadie smith

WORK CITED

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