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## A BAKHTINIAN APPROACH TO ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH*\*

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### Abstract

In her novel *White Teeth* (2000), Zadie Smith explores the changing shape of late twentieth century Britain from hybrid and multi-generational viewpoints. Being aware of the pervasiveness of Thatcher's ideological legacies in the post-Thatcher era, Smith offers an alternative discourse of Britishness that reveals the homogenizing effects of Thatcherite nationalism. Accordingly, *White Teeth* portrays hybrid communities in relation to Bhabha's notion of a hybrid third space, which is extended to the Bakhtinian conception of the third space. In this sense, Smith's hybrid world is constituted through the interpenetration of alternative and conservative discourses as well as the chronotopic interplay of multiple times and spaces, which emphasize the denaturalizing effects of her writing. Such spaces remind Bakhtin's heteroglossic and dialogic conceptions of carnival, which suggest a reevaluation of the way that the traditional conception of Britishness is understood in the late twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Mikhail Bakhtin, Zadie Smith, Chronotope, Heteroglossia, The Carnavalesque, Dialogism.

### 1. Introduction

Zadie Smith's debut novel *White Teeth* (2000) examines "New Britain," which embraces various cultures, religions, races and ethnicities, from hybrid and multi-generational perspective. Accordingly, her work depicts hybrid communities that remind Bhabha's notion of third space, a "liminal space" (4) that redefines the notion of Britishness and keeps away from both the hegemonic discourse inherent in Thatcherism and the essentialist implications of national identity.

In *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith critically explores the socio-political climate of post-Thatcher Britain. In this manner, the central protagonists are a middle-aged English man, Archie Jones, and a Bengalese waiter, Samad Iqbal. At the novel's outset, Archie attempts to commit suicide. His short contact with death leads him to an "end of the world" party, January 1, 1975, where he meets and later marries a much younger Jamaican woman, Clara Bowden (*WT*, 2001: 20). As *White Teeth* continues, the reader learns that Archie and Samad became friends while fighting together in the Second World War. They are subsequently brought together in mid 1970's London when Samad and his wife, Alsana, immigrate to Britain. The succeeding narrative examines the lives of the two couples and their children, foregrounding generational oppositions between Samad, Alsana and their twin sons Milat and Magid, and between Clara, Archie and their daughter Irie. Smith then introduces a liberal family, the Chalfens, who make the already involved relationships intricate. The narrative again focuses on generational tensions between the Chalfen parents, Joyce and Marcus, and their rebellious son, Joshua.

### 2. Chronotope in *White Teeth*

The narrative structure of the novel passes between past, present and future. *White Teeth* is divided into four parts, each of which contains a character's name and two dates that are related to each other as the chapters progress. The first section of the novel is entitled "Archie: 1974, 1945" and focuses on Archie's generation. As the title indicates, this section begins with Archie's attempted suicide January 1, 1975, before examining the events that lead to his suicide attempt. The narrator then explains his relationship with Samad, focusing on their experiences in the Second World War. Smith's non-chronological narrative suggests that past, present and future are mutually implicit overlapping concepts. In this manner, Smith avoids teleological implications that ascribes value or validity to past history since the past is embedded in present and future discourse.

Ironically, Archie's and Samad's first "taste of war" happens after the Second World War has already ended (*WT*, 2001: 108). Additionally, upon returning from the war, the narrator states "God help him if [Archie] mentioned the war [...] No one really wanted to know" (*WT*, 2001: 14). Here, Smith destabilizes the central position of World War II to British history, questioning the experiences that surround the war.

\* Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (Toronto: Penguin, 2001). All the future references to this work will be to the abbreviated title *WT* and the page number.

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Colonial discourses then affect the novel's discussion of World War II. When Samad's children visit an elderly pensioner to make a charity donation and note that their father "played for England" in the war, the veteran remarks "There were certainly no wogs as I remember – though you're probably not allowed to say that these days are you?" (WT, 2001: 172) The veteran's argument reminds the conservative politician Norman Tebbit's controversial statement which Smith uses as an epigraph at the outset of this section: "The cricket test – which side do they cheer for? ... Are you still looking back to where you came from or where you are" (WT, 2001: 123). Accordingly, Samad's presence in the war serves as a destabilizing agent that challenges the "inclusivity" that British history and Britishness state to be a colonial power.

By foregrounding the dialogic relationship between past, present and future, the embeddedness of time and space throughout *White Teeth* reminds Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope. Bakhtin asserts that the chronotope is of great representational importance: "time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, makes blood flow through their veins" ("Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" 250). Accordingly, *White Teeth* presents a series of chronotopic centers that bring temporal narratives together by means of spatial representation. In this manner, Samad remarks the interrelatedness of time and space in a missionary church that he encounters while in the Second World War:

It was covered in words, this church. Words left three hundred years earlier by dissenters, unwilling to pay a burial tax during a cholera epidemic, locked in the church by a corrupt landlord and left to die in there – but not before they covered every wall with letters to family, poems, statements of eternal disobedience. Samad liked the story well enough when he first heard it, but it only truly struck him when the morphine hit. Then every nerve in his body would be alive, and the information, all the information contained in the universe, all the information on the walls, would pop its cork and flow through him like electricity through a ground wire (WT, 2001: 101).

Samad's morphine use indicates his spatial relation to the past, present and future. At the same time, for Samad, the church as a time and space signifies the blend of temporal periods. Significantly, this incident indicates that the chronotope refers to moments where narrative patterns come together. In this sense, Samad's sons, Millat and Magid, later experience this moment again. The twins meet in a "blank room" (WT, 2001: 463) at the college and cover the room with their words in an act that emphasizes Samad's experience with the church:

They make a mockery of that idea, a neutral place; instead they cover the room with history – past, present and future history (for there is such a thing) – they take what was blank and smear it with the stinking shit of the past like excitable excremental children. They cover this neutral room in themselves. Every gripe, the earliest memories, every debated principle, every contested belief (WT, 2001: 464).

As Bakhtin points out, the twins, in fact, become "flesh" and "blood" indicators of past, present and future and thereby "the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel" ("Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" 250). This chronotopic fact is particularly important as the end of the novel covers another "blank or neutral" space. Smith then states that

... all these people are heading for the same room. [...] a clean slate; white/chrome/pure/plain (this was the design brief) used for the meetings of people who want to meet somewhere neutral at the end of the twentieth century; a virtual place where their business [...] can be done in an emptiness, an uncontaminated cavity; the logical endpoint of a thousand years of spaces too crowded and bloody (WT, 2001: 518).

The end of the novel is another "neutral" space that will be covered by the characters' pasts, presents and futures.

### 3. The Carnavalesque in *White Teeth*

Throughout *White Teeth*, the existence of chronotopic moments points to the carnivalesque atmosphere of the novel. Just as the chronotope underlines the mutually implicit relationship between time and space, carnival suggests the mutual penetration of social and individual histories. From the outset, the novel is rendered carnivalesque through Archie's attempted suicide and subsequent rebirth.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin points out that laughter and degradation are central to the time and space of carnival. He notes that "to degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. [...] Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one" (Bakhtin, 1984: 21). At the beginning of the novel, Archie's attempted suicide is then comic. The butcher who saves him notes " 'We're not licensed for suicides around here. This place halal. Kosher, understand? If you're going to die around here, my friend, I'm afraid you've got to be thoroughly bled first'" (WT, 2001: 7). The narrator then states "It occurred to him that, for the

first time since his birth, Life had said Yes to Archie Jones" (*WT*, 2001: 7). Archie's attempted suicide thereby becomes a comic rebirth that is emphasized by the fact that he is saved on New Year's Day, 1975.

At the same time, his rebirth is exemplified by the grotesque elements that surround his death. At first, he is presented as impotent, unable to kill himself. The narrator states that

for a few days he ignored the decision of the coin and just drove around [...] and all the time the Hoover tube lay like a great flaccid cock on his back seat, mocking his fear, laughing at his pigeon steps as he approached the executioner, sneering at his impotent decision (*WT*, 2001: 11).

His incapability to choose life or death is indicated by means of the carnivalesque representation of the Hoover tube, which he eventually uses in his attempt to suffocate himself. Subsequently, his decision that he wants the "extra time" indicates the starting point of carnival as he experiences a second beginning through his actions. Actually, his new life is signaled by the birth of a daughter, Irie, rather than his coin toss.

The remembrance of war experiences at the end of the first section renders Archie's suicide. In deciding whether or not to kill the Nazi doctor that they capture, Archie states "A man shouldn't die in a car" (*WT*, 2001: 120). Although his words refer to Doctor Sick, his statement recalls the form of his attempted suicide. In addition, Archie's decision to kill or not to kill Dr. Sick is rendered by means of the coin toss; likewise, his own suicide attempt originates from his arbitrary coin toss. Archie's continuous toss of a coin points to the arbitrariness of actions which later becomes important to future outcomes and relating past, present and future. For instance, Archie's coin tosses affect his twins' future, deciding which boy will be sent to India to be educated and which will stay in England. In keeping with Bakhtin's notion of carnival, moments of death constitute rebirth.

#### 4. Heteroglossia in *White Teeth*

In Bakhtinian terms, Smith's proliferation of characters and thereby diverse voices that exist in the novel recall the heteroglossic nature of the novel. In a broader sense, heteroglossia refers to multiple voices and thereby different uses of language and multiple ideologies as a stratification of numerous discourses. According to Bakhtin, there is a constant conflict between these varieties of language and thereby language moves towards and against the center (Bakhtin, 1981: 268-72).

In this respect, in *White Teeth*, one hears many voices in conflict; these voices are involved in a dialogue in which no point of view is privileged and there is no finalization. Clara, Archie's Jamaican wife, then constitutes a good example regarding the representation of language varieties. Her language is distinctive for its dialectal features; she has a Jamaican accent: "Hush yo mou! You're nat dat ol'. I seen older. [...] Clive you bin playing wid dis poor man?" (*WT*, 2001: 25). In addition, her language is distinctive for its individual speech features. She has a problem with her teeth, so she utters "sh" sound: "Irie, please... I'm exhausted... I'm shrying koo gesh shome shleep" (*WT*, 2001: 377).

There are also many other characters of different origins. For instance, Ryan Topps, Clara's ex-boyfriend, is a white man with red hair and has a distinct Cockney accent: "Wot? [...] You wot?" (*WT*, 2001: 35). Likewise, Abdul-Mickey is the owner of O'Connell's, a cafe where Archie and Samad go frequently. He is an Arabian who speaks with a Cockney accent after living in London for many years: "Seems a bit dodgy to me, messing wiv God an' all that. 'Sides I ain't that scientifically minded, you see. Go right over my head" (*WT*, 2001: 452).

Among the multiple characters in the novel, the language of an Italian grandmother is worth mentioning: "[H]e take everything capisce? He take-a her mind, he take-a the blender, he take-a the old stereo - he take-a everything except the floorboards. It make-a you sick..." (*WT*, 2001: 10). Her English is not fluent with those "-a" sounds after each verb, which is a common feature of Italians speaking English. Besides, it involves some Italian words like "capisce".

At the same time, the Chalfen family has their origins in Germany, Poland and Ireland and thereby Joyce and Marcus Chalfen's son Joshua is depicted as a "cross pollination between a lapsed-Catholic horticulturalist feminist, and an intellectual Jew" (*WT*, 2001: 309). However, they are fully assimilated to British culture. As can be understood from the example below, it is difficult for Marcus to articulate non-English sounds: "'Mill-yat Ickball,' " said Marcus, making a performance of the foreign syllables" (*WT*, 2001: 317).

Heteroglossia also enters the novel through the speeches of narrators. As Bakhtin points out, most of the time "[t]he narrator's speech is just as individualized, colorful, and nonauthoritative as is the speech of the characters" (Bakhtin, 1994: 66). In this regard, *White Teeth* is told by a third person narrator. The narrator's tone changes; it is notably formal in the very first sentences, but later the narrator employs a more conversational tone. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator uses a storytelling style:

Early in the morning, late in the century, Cricklewood Boadway. At 06.27 hours on 1 January 1975, Alfred Archibald Jones was dressed in corduroy and sat in a fume-filled Cavalier Muskeeter Estate face down on the steering wheel hoping the judgement would not be too heavy upon him (*WT*, 2001: 3).

In the chapter describing the war experiences of Archie and Samad, the narrator employs a rhythm which reminds a military discourse, which is repetitious, interrupted, and concise:

Back, back, back. Well, all right, then. Back to Archie spit-clean, pink-faced and polished, looking just old enough at seventeen to fool the men from the medical board with their pencils and their measuring tape. Back to Samad, two years older and the warm color of baked bread. Back to the day when they were first assigned to each other, [...] (*WT*, 2001: 83).

In addition, as the narrator's formal tone softens, the novel then has an ironic tone: "Of course, like the mother of a drug addict or the neighbour of a serial killer, Clara was the last to know" (*WT*, 2001: 41).

Moreover, for Bakhtin, heteroglossia enters the novel throughout the authorial speech, creating "character zones:"

These zones are formed from the fragments of character speech [polureč'], from scattered words and sayings belonging to someone else's speech, from those invasions into authorial speech of others' expressive indicators (ellipsis, questions, exclamations). Such a character zone is the field of action for a character's voice, encroaching in one way or another upon the author's voice (Bakhtin, 1981: 316).

Accordingly, in the following description narrated by the third-person, the presentation of the thought of Alsana combines both authorial report and interior monologue:

But then, as she approached a large white van open at the back and looked enviously at the furniture that was piled up in it, she recognized the black lady who was leaning over a garden fence, looking dreamily into the air towards the library (half dressed, though! A lurid purple vest, underwear almost), as if her future lay in that direction (*WT*, 2001: 64-65).

Similarly, the author's presentation of the narrator's speech in free indirect discourse is indicated by the parenthetical expression in the example below:

At the corner of the road Alsana popped behind the post office and removed her pinchy sandals in favor of Samad's shoes. (It was an oddity about Alsana. She was small but her feet were enormous. You felt instinctively when looking at her that she had yet more growing to do.) (*WT*, 2001: 64)

However, in the following sentence, descriptions are narrated from the characters' points of view: "She needed no bra - she was independent, even of gravity - she wore a red halterneck which stopped below her bust, underneath which she wore her belly button (beautifully) and underneath that some very tight yellow jeans" (*WT*, 2001: 24). Here, Archie sees Clara for the first time. This scene is depicted from Archie's point of view, as is evidenced by parenthetical information.

Furthermore, heteroglossia enters the novel through "incorporated genres" (Dentith, 1995: 215). These inserted genres such as short stories, lyrical songs, poems, diary entries, travel notes, personal letters bring into the novel their own languages and thereby stratify the language of the novel and strengthen its speech diversity (Dentith, 1995: 215). In this manner, throughout *White Teeth*, there are allusions to the words of Paul Sorvino, an actor in gangster films: "Great, supwoib, so we all know each other. [...] Now let's get down to business" (*WT*, 2001: 447). Likewise, Millat also adapts the opening line of the movie *GoodFellas* to his own way of life: "As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a ganster" (*WT*, 2001: 446).

In *White Teeth*, there are also some letters written by Archie's friend, Horst Ibelgaufts. In fact, Ibelgaufts never appears in person in the novel but only appears through his correspondance with Archie (*WT*, 2001: 16). At the same time, the correspondance between Marcus and Magid appears in the epistolary form (*WT*, 2001: 366-68). Additionally, a news report on TV about the fall of Berlin Wall (*WT*, 2001: 240), a notice about transportation on New Year's Day (*WT*, 2001: 498) and an excerpt from the New Testament (*WT*, 2001: 538), dictionary entries (*WT*, 2001: 316,413) are also inserted into the novel. In this manner, the insertion of various genres into the novel *White Teeth* contributes to the heteroglot characteristic of the novel and enriches the style of the novel as well.

The last section of the novel particularly foregrounds Bakhtin's identification of the social implications of individual utterances. This section entitled "Magid, Millat and Marcus 1992, 1999" presents a series of three epigraphs that deal with the meaning of "fundamental." The first definition Smith cites states:

**fundamental/** a. & n. IME. Adj. 1 Of or pertaining to the basis or groundwork; going to the root of the matter. 2 Serving as the base or foundation; essential or indispensable. Also, primary, original; from which others are derived. 3 Of or pertaining to the foundation(s) of a building. 4 Of a stratum: lowest, lying at the bottom (*WT*, 2001: 413).

This dictionary definition emphasizes the common implications of the word fundamental, stating the ranges of its use. The next definition is juxtaposed with the first:

**fundamentalism** n. E20 [f. prec. +ism.] The strict maintenance of traditional orthodox religious beliefs or doctrines; esp. belief in the inerrancy of religious texts (*WT*, 2001: 413).

The last epigraph is a stanza from the Herman Hupfeld song "As Time Goes By," made famous in the film *Casablanca*, foregrounding the word fundamental:

You must remember this, a kiss is still a kiss,  
A sigh is just a sigh;  
The fundamental things apply,  
As time goes by (*WT*, 2001: 413).

Here, fundamentalism serves as a discourse to manage difference. The characters attempt to make use of fundamentalist discourse to establish their identities. When Smith cites the lines from "As Time Goes By," she expresses the sentimentality that tempts to Irie as she examines the roots of her own identity in Jamaica. Another aspect of "fundamental" in the dictionary definition Smith cites is "going to the root of the matter," which is exactly what Irie does when she explores her family's Jamaican past. At the same time, the followers of KEVIN maintain "traditional orthodox religious beliefs or doctrines" and thereby their fundamentalism is essentialist in the sense that is exemplified by the first dictionary definition of "fundamental". On the other hand, Marcus Chalfen believes that he has discovered the "basis or groundwork" of being an "essential," "primary," and "original" genetic code that remove multiplicity.

Accordingly, Smith's use of various fundamentalism throughout the novel makes up a language for talking about Bakhtin's "dialogized heteroglossia", which refers to the interaction between different languages of heteroglossia within the novel (Gardiner, 1991: 34-35). In this regard, dialogism refers to the relationships between diverse elements in the novel and it is not only restricted to heteroglossia. As it can become a characteristic of the languages constituting the "heteroglot" world in the novel when the writer puts these languages into dialogic relations, it can also become a characteristic of the polyphonic novel when the author puts characters and narrator's voices into dialogic interactions. For Bakhtin, in the polyphonic novel, "[t]he character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own" (Bakhtin, 1984: 5). Therefore, the characters in *White Teeth* are free people, not a mouthpiece for the author and their voices are distinct on their own. They represent "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world," since they are "not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse" with their voices (Bakhtin, 1984: 6).

Additionally, in some respects, Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia indicates the central principles of the poststructuralist idea of intertextuality. As Bakhtin points out, the heteroglot novel incorporates different genres and languages and thereby it turns out to be hybrid construction. Smith's *White Teeth* also foregrounds intertextual links such as Herman Hupfeld song "As Time Goes By," with the use of parody and illusion.

In this manner, by contrasting the three epigraphs, Smith emphasizes the ideological influences that support the characters' relationships with each other. As Bakhtin puts forth, "[t]he novelistic plot must organize the exposure of social languages and ideologies, the exhibiting and experiencing of such languages. [...] the novelistic plot serves to represent speaking persons and their ideological worlds" (Bakhtin, 1981: 365-6). In this way, the novel itself becomes a hybrid construction, in which different languages live, illuminate each other and are dialogically interrelated. In order to create this hybrid construction, the novelist "welcomes the heteroglossia and language diversity of the literary and extraliterary language into his own work not only not weakening them but even intensifying them" (Bakhtin, 1981: 298). The word fundamental then penetrates the last chapter, particularly the novel itself, foregrounding the hybrid construction and "dialogized heteroglossia". As a result, Britain progressively becomes carnivalesque dependent upon the destabilization of traditional British pasts advocated by Thatcher by means of the dialogic penetration of an "intentional and conscious artistic hybrid" discourses (Bakhtin, 1981: 360).

Earlier in the novel, Alsana highlights her own definition of fundamental, which is connected with her understanding of the differences between people:

you could divide the whole humanity into two distinct camps, as far as she was concerned, simply by asking them to complete a very simple questionnaire [...]

- (a) Are the skies you sleep under likely to open up for weeks on end?
- (b) Is the ground you walk on likely to tremble and split?
- (c) Is there a chance [...] that the ominous mountain casting a midday shadow over your home might one day erupt with no rhyme or reason? (*WT*, 2001: 210)

Alsana's statement is interesting in relation to Bakhtin's notions of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism. In this respect, Bakhtin points out that "degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time" (Bakhtin, 1984: 21). Since the grotesque body is the social body, it is related to the physical implications of the world. The "splitting" of the ground is thereby a carnivalesque image with regard to the "swallowing up" and "rebirth" that coincides with the imagery of earthquake. In this respect, as Bakhtin points out in *Rabelais and His World*, the grotesque body image "reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (24). At the same time, in a grotesque image "we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis." In this way, the body images remain "ambivalent and contradictory" (Bakhtin, 1984: 24-25).

Moreover, Smith's involvement with the notions of the word "fundamental" suggests her interest in biology throughout *White Teeth*. In this sense, Marcus Chalfen is a geneticist whose research "manipulate[s] ova, regulate[s] the over or under expression of a gene" and in doing so "plant[s] instructions and imperatives in the germ line to be realized in physical characteristics" (WT, 2001: 312). Chalfen's work is then applied to a mouse, whose future will be genetically determined. In this regard, the exhibition of Marcus Chalfen's FutureMouse© project can be considered as a carnival square, a gathering place for heterogeneous people participating in carnival. In this carnival square, all heterogeneous people and groups become one, joining the carnival sense of the world, but they preserve their diversities. In other words, during carnival "[a]ll things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations" (Bakhtin, 1984: 123). Thus, heterogeneous and incompatible elements interact closely with each other at the same level. In this manner, the Islamic fundamentalist group of KEVIN, the fundamentalist animal activist group FATE, Hortense and her fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and the other characters are brought together in a carnivalesque atmosphere of the exhibition of FutureMouse© project. The carnival imagery is also emphasized by the fact that the exhibition takes place on New Year's Eve.

Meanwhile, as these heterogeneous elements establish their presence, the implications of racial, religious, and cultural tension are transferred into another moment of comic redemption. Here again the impulse for this renewal is Archie who saves the life of Dr. Sick, but the noticeable difference in this scene is that when Millat fires the gun, Archie "is there with no coin to help him" (WT, 2001: 442). In this manner, Bakhtin's notion of the carnival not only provides a means to examine this scene, but is also useful to understand the ridiculously tragic tone of the novel. In this sense, the carnival is an example of comedy that defines *White Teeth*. As Bakhtin explains,

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part (Bakhtin, 1984: 7).

From this perspective, the carnival represents "a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings." In carnival, a renewed, "second life... is thus constructed" (Bakhtin, 1984: 11). Accordingly, after saving Dr. Sick from certain death, preventing Millat from committing and being charged with murder, freeing the FutureMouse, and stopping untold disaster operated by KEVIN, FATE, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, Archie can only stare at the mouse and surprise at the plentifulness of what Bakhtin termed "second life."

Smith then examines the implications of predetermination through a discussion concerning the logical conclusions of such work. Chalfen notes

The public were three steps ahead of him [...] they had already played out their endgames, already concluded what the result of his research would be – something he did not presume to imagine! – full of their clones, zombies, designer children, gay genes. Of course he understood the work he did involved some element of moral luck; so it is for all men of science (WT, 2001: 420).

By dealing with the FutureMouse©, Smith redefines the notion of purity which is inherent in the Thatcher era through immigration policies and the racist speeches of Norman Tebbit and Enoch Powell. In an effective manner, Smith also demonstrates the dangers of pre-determination, emphasizing the merging of official and unofficial discourses; in other words, the central position of hybridity to her characters with the incorporation of heteroglossia.

To put in another way, for Bakhtin, two opposing forces are always at work in any particular utterance: "centripetal forces" and "centrifugal forces" (Bakhtin, 1981: 271). As Bell and Gardiner point out,

"[c]entripetal forces push towards unity, agreement and monologue, while the centrifugal forces seek multiplicity, disagreement and heteroglossia" (16). Accordingly, as Bakhtin points out, the heteroglot nature of language tries to move language from its centralizing tendencies: "[a]longside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (Bakhtin, 1981: 271). In this way, novelistic discourse turns out to be a battlefield for centripetal and centrifugal forces.

Furthermore, Joyce Chalfen dedicates a chapter of her book on gardening to the significance of cross-pollination, stating "cross-pollination produces more varied offspring that are better able to cope with a changed environment" (WT, 2001: 309). While Joyce employs the language of pollination and difference in relation to the cultivation of plants and further claims to be liberalist, she constantly renders Millat as "exotic". In this manner, the Chalfen family reveals the problematic feature of Liberalism in Britain. Smith then uses carnivalesque humor to invert original meaning:

'[...]where are you from if you don't mind me asking?'  
'Willesden,' said Irie and Millat simultaneously.  
'Yes, yes, of course, but where originally?'  
'Oh' said Millat [...] 'You mean where am I from originally'  
Joyce looked confused. 'Yes, originally'  
'Whitechapel,' said Millat, pulling out a fag. 'Via the Royal London Hospital and the 207 bus' (WT, 2001: 319).

Here, Joyce's question emphasizes the deviating implications of "fundamental" and "original" within the context of late twentieth century Britain. At the same time, the associative implications of the two words reveal the predominance of colonial ideology.

*White Teeth* constantly recreates carnivalesque moments. It is this feature that makes the novel both "hysterically realist," a phrase coined by James Wood, and "utopic" (Squires, 2002: 74). Smith notes

It is a kind of fantasy book [...] There is a lot of pessimism currently about race relations in this country. I think the relationships in the book are to be wished for, but I think they might exist now, and certainly in the future, with the amount of mixing up that has gone on (WT, 2001: 229).

*White Teeth* is a more optimistic portrayal of contemporary Britain that is strengthened by the carnival throughout the novel. The novel is thereby prevalent with the images of pregnancy and rebirth, emphasizing carnival's constant regeneration.

Ambrosia, Hortense, Clara, Alsana, Joyce and Irie all give birth throughout the novel. Additionally, their pregnancies are rendered carnivalesque. For instance, Ambrosia gives birth during an earthquake, Hortense gives birth to Clara at an advanced age, and the paternity of Irie's child will remain a mystery. The narrator then describes Ambrosia's history and Hortense's birth:

Every moment happens twice: inside and outside, and they are two different histories. Outside of Ambrosia there was much white stone [...] All was preternaturally calm as Glenard began to touch her. But inside, there was a galloping heartbeat, the crush of a million muscles [...] But outside Ambrosia was frozen. [...] And then the world began to shake. Inside Ambrosia waters broke (WT, 2001: 360-61).

The contrast between inside and outside reflects the world of carnival. The outside world indicates Glenard's attempt to rape Ambrosia and her reactions. In contrast, inside world indicates Ambrosia's carnivalesque resistance. Outside and inside are then brought together by means of the destructive earthquake and subsequent birth which harmonize oppositions between external world and internal individual. In a similar manner, by becoming pregnant at the end of the novel and carrying a child of mixed and unknown father, Irie becomes a carrier of the future, a space that embodies multiple and unknowable intersections between time and spaces. Her pregnancy further situates her body as a grotesque body, which reflects connections between inside and outside. In this sense, as Bakhtin points out,

[a]ll the images of carnival are dualistic; they unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis: birth and death (the image of pregnant death), blessing and curse (benedictory carnival curses which call simultaneously for death and rebirth), praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and wisdom (Bakhtin, 1984: 126).

At the same time, in relation to the images of pregnancy and rebirth, Bakhtin gives an example of the famous Kerch terracotta collection, in which figurines of senile pregnant hags can be seen:

This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new



life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its two fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness (Bakhtin, 1984: 25-6).

Through the renewing characteristic of grotesque realism, even death “is not a negation of life seen as the great body of all the people but part of life as a whole – its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation. Death is here always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth’s life-giving womb” (Bakhtin, 1984: 49).

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis of Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* with the Bakhtinian concepts of chronotope, heteroglossia, polyphony and the carnivalesque has revealed that *White Teeth* is a dialogic novel with its heteroglot nature, polyphonic structure and inclusion of the chronotope and the carnivalesque. While Bakhtin’s ideas provide considerable insight into *White Teeth*, as the results of the novel’s analysis show, Bakhtin’s ideas work well in practice with novels that show diversity and that foreground dialogic relations in terms of language use, structure and thematic concerns.

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