Edited by Philip Tew, *Reading Zadie Smith* is a collection of essays that looks at Zadie Smith’s work from her first novel, *White Teeth* (2000), to her then most recent book, *NW* (2012). The essays in this collection engage critically with Smith’s novels, short stories and other writing. The contributors do not look at Smith’s work through a monochromatic postcolonial lens or try to fit Smith and her work into a predetermined theoretical framework. The novelty of the collection as a whole lies in the variety of critical approaches to Smith’s œuvre that it presents.

The first three essays of *Reading Zadie Smith* are on Smith’s first and by far the most famous novel, *White Teeth*. The first essay, Brad Buchanan’s “The Gift that Keeps on Giving”: Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* and the Posthuman, highlights Smith’s intellectual engagement with posthumanist traditions to wrestle with the problem of what unites human beings through a persistent use of Oedipus trope. In Buchanan’s reading, the climax of *White Teeth* questions Fukuyama’s theory that ‘science takes away a human being’s autonomy’. The second essay, Ulrike Tancke’s ‘White Teeth Reconsidered: Narrative Deception and Uncomfortable Truths’, traces the early positive reception of *White Teeth* as well as the latter, more critical questioning of the commoditisation and ‘perceived exploitation of exoticism’ of, both, the author and the novel, but does not agree with either of the views. According to Tancke, *White Teeth* is a layered presentation of uncomfortable truths under a veneer of humour where migration is ‘the original trauma of not belonging’, hybridity is a source of anxiety, and multicultural coexistence is an experience threatening the idea of selfhood and identity owing to the blurring of ethnic boundaries. The third essay, Joanna O’Leary’s ‘Body Larceny: Somatic Seizure and Control in *White Teeth*’, gives us yet another reading of *White Teeth* that is totally different from the rosy, utopian version of multiculturalism in the initial reviews. Through the characters of *White Teeth* and its central theme of somatic manipulation and genetic engineering, O’Leary analyses the way Smith presents the ‘human body’ as a site of expression of identity as well as a site of conflict between the desire to control and the resistance to it, of conflict between acceptance of the existing/actual body form and the quest for a desired/ideal body form.

The next two essays focus on Smith’s second novel *The Autograph Man* (2002), generally considered a disappointing second act. The first essay is Philip Tew’s ‘Celebrity, Suburban Identity and Transatlantic Epiphanies: Reconsidering Zadie Smith’s *The Autograph Man*’. Tew opposes the initial criticism of the novel’s ‘irrelevant intensity’ and superficial presentation of the equally superficial ‘hollow things of modernity’ such as cinema, celebrity and overvaluation of symbol over reality, experience and substance. Tew’s aim is to redeem the novel by highlighting Smith's rejection of the contemporary obsession with symbols, of over-intellectualisation of life that occludes the ‘human’ desire and quest for identity, meaning and authenticity. The following essay, Tracey K. Parker’s “I Could Have Been Somebody”: The Articulation of Identity in Zadie Smith’s *The Autograph Man*, reads *The Autograph Man* as a continuation of Smith’s ‘exploration of the meaning and value of popular culture in contemporary subject’s life’ (69) begun in *White Teeth*. Parker draws attention to Smith’s simultaneous engagement with Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreal, wherein image has replaced the ‘real’ in the current era and pursuit of the simulacra has rendered human existence superficial, and Stuart Hall’s interrogation of this pessimistic vision of contemporary life as meaningless to focus on the ‘meaning’ that the contemporary individual ‘reads’ in the hyperreal image.
In the following essay, “‘Temporal Layers’: Personal and Political History in Zadie Smith’s On Beauty” Susan Alice Fischer focuses on Smith’s third novel, On Beauty (2005). In Parker’s reading, On Beauty, as a part of contemporary literature’s ‘historical turn’, subtly ‘highlights the place of history in our everyday lives’ (83). According to Parker, Smith explores the ways in which slavery and the more recent debates around ‘affirmative action’ play a role in the formation of US identity with the aim to indicate that the ‘only way forward’ is to become aware of and acknowledge past hurts and the way they affect contemporary life.

The next two essays look at Smith’s most recent novel NW (2012), published only a few months before Reading Zadie Smith. In ‘The Right to a Secret: Zadie Smith's NW’, Lynn Wells observes Derrida’s influence on NW, where the right to keep secrets is an expression of uniqueness and of the desire to maintain one’s individuality. Derrida thought of secrets as a resistance to hegemonic, panoptic space of collective narratives. According to Wells, by revealing the secrets of the social/marginalised/stereotypical ‘others’, Smith invites the reader to go beyond the social norms and hegemonic narratives to seek the unique story of each individual. The following essay is ‘Revisionary Modernism and Postmillennial Experimentation in Zadie Smith’s NW’, by Wendy Knepper. Knepper reads NW as an experimental novel and an expression of Smith’s belief that ‘style is a writer’s way of telling the truth’ (111). Knepper highlights the links between NW and Smith's critical essay, ‘Two Directions for the Novel’, placing the novel within the avant-garde prose tradition from Melville to Kafka to Tom McCarthy. In Knepper’s reading, Smith experiments with spatial narrative, disrupted chronologies, and graphical presentation in search of a new aesthetics to respond to the effects of postmillennial, post 9/11 global anxieties and prevailing norms of racio-cultural ‘othering’ on a ‘locality’.

The rest of the essays focus on certain aspects of Smith’s oeuvre. In “‘That God Chip in the Brain’: Religion in the Fiction of Zadie Smith”, Magdalena Mączyńska considers Smith’s ambivalence toward religiosity in view of the centrality of the theme of religion in her fiction, both, as an influence that shapes the modern world and continues to have a hold on contemporary imagination. Mączyńska highlights Smith’s understanding of the aesthetical, spiritual need and longing that drives people to religion as well as her strong aversion to fundamentalist beliefs and sects whether in religion or science.

In 'The Novel's Third Way: Zadie Smith’s “Hysterical Realism”', Christopher Holmes draws attention to Smith’s faith in the ability of the ‘novel’ as a literary form to deal with the complexities of contemporaneity. Holmes argues that, in Smith's aesthetics, Novel as an 'analogue of thought' is capable of 'meeting' and dealing with contradictory ideas. For Holmes, Smith suggests a new way of looking at ‘reading’ by thinking of novel as an architectural structure that ‘invites thoughts in’ in various ways; a structure/form that offers gaps in relationality, and thereby an opportunity for readers to bridge these gaps, to ‘come to know and understand’ through this process.

In ‘Eliminating the Random, Ruling the World: Monologic Hybridity in Zadie Smith’s White Teeth and Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children’, Lewis MacLeod traces the similarities between Midnight’s Children and White Teeth to point out the ease with which Rushdie and his novel can be used to critique White Teeth. Underlining the classificatory and ‘othering’ impulse inherent to the idea of ‘dirt as impurity’, Lewis draws attention to the fact that once any dirt is accepted within the folds of a counter-establishment practice of classification it becomes part of that system and a determinant of what then is considered as ‘dirt’. The analogy is very clear. Lewis here is suggesting that though White Teeth has been praised for its portrayal of hybridity, heterogeneity and for the newness of this portrayal, its newness and its subjects are always already contained within an
established ‘countercanonical’ literary practice that is a Rushdian legacy, just as they are circumscribed by prevailing homogenised and hegemonic critical expectations.

The last essay, Lucienne Loh’s ‘Zadie Smith’s Short Stories: Englishness in a Globalized World’, is different from the rest of the collection because it focuses on Smith’s short stories to identify and analyse three key themes in the body of this short fiction. These themes are British multiculturalism in a globalized world, Smith’s white English bourgeois women, and post-war English masculinity and Smith’s men. As the themes indicate, Smith’s short fiction explores the contemporary notion of Englishness, the way it manifests itself in non-English situations in real and fictional world, and the way it is manifested differently by English middle-class women and men. Loh suggests that Smith's short fiction combines elements from the American and English traditions of short fiction.

Barring the missing last letters from a few words, nothing mars the stimulating experience offered by these essays. This collection is an important addition to the corpus of critical response to Smith’s work and a must read for those who wish to engage with her fiction, whether for study or pleasure.

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