

TRANSFORMATIVE DYSTOPIA IN ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH*

Hristo Boev¹, Shumen University, Bulgaria

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46687/BXZG5617>

Abstract: *This paper explores a hitherto unexplored issue in Zadie Smith's White Teeth (2000), and namely the meaningfulness of the fact that two of the main characters in the novel, the Englishman Alfred Archibald Jones (Archie) and the Indian Bengali – Samad Iqbal, go through an extreme dystopian experience leading to their discovery of multiculturalism during World War II in the spaces of a defunct British tank and of a little Bulgarian village near the Greek and Turkish border. The paper examines some of the cultural incongruities in the novel, which renders the “Bulgarian” experience there locked in a dystopian space generated by the Bulgarian village as well as delineates the transformative significance of this experience in Archie's and Samad's awakening to multiculturalism.*

Key words: *multiculturalism, Bulgarian, British, dystopian, postcolonial*

The fascination of the West with Bulgaria as an exotic country on the edge of the known world (Europe) has a long history of artistic references representing Bulgarian spaces in it as incursions into a world of order, reinstating the disorder and chaos located in the periphery of the known. For instance, in Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) the princess of Thunder-ten-Tronckh is raped by the Bulgarians, who come out of the blue to destroy preposterous courtly order and establish the disorder of war. In the movie *The Terminal* (2004) Tom Hanks speaks “Krakozian” (Bulgarian), the dystopian country itself (Krakozia) is presented as a corrupt state torn by civil war with an illegitimate government, which has taken power during the protagonist's air flight to New York, resulting in his passport becoming invalid in the USA and his getting stranded for a year in the transit zone of JFK Airport, unable to return to his country or effectively enter New York. The sense of postmodernist frustration resulting from the Krakozian war, activating all existing red tape and spawning *Catch 22* situations related to Bulgarian cultural referents or topoi, has a prehistory in the subliminal road sign in another movie – *Dracula* (1992), which announces to the Western traveler: “Varna, End of the World”. Beginning of the new millennium representations of Bulgaria by Bulgarian cinematographers, such as the film *Blueberry Hill* (2002) in which a German gets marooned in a surreal no-name Bulgarian village on his road to Istanbul, also tend to reflect this view, perhaps a result of mirroring these images of Bulgaria, in a bizarre attempt at promoting the country as a no-place of “wonderful” happenings bordering on the grotesque and absurd, the list could continue.

¹ Hristo Boev, Ph.D. is a Senior assistant professor of English and American Literature at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Shumen, Bulgaria. He is the author of the books: *Modern(ist) Portrayals of the City in Dickens and Dos Passos* and *The Different Dobruja in the Literature between the Wars* (original title in Bulgarian). He is also a translator of English and Romanian with numerous literary translations to his credit. His main interests lie in the fields of Comparative Literature, Modernism, Literary Urbanism, Geocriticism and the Art of translation. Email: h.boev@shu.bg

Along these lines of representation, the Bulgarian war experience in *White Teeth* is real as part of World War II, surreal as a simulacrum of an (im)possible Bulgarian reality and even unreal at the same time being situated in an unnamed village (town) on Bulgarian territory. The war is over, but just as the village has been little affected by the war itself, turning into a haven for defectors, straggling Nazis and a Frenchman who has worked for the Nazis on their sterilization program, the actual end of the war does not reach it. Consequently, the *lawful* killing sanctioned by the war about which everyone in the village has heard, continues unchecked within its boundaries of no-place. As Sexton (2007) claims in "Dickens' Hard Times and Dystopia", a dystopia is not only a *no-place*, but a *bad place* and as such in Zadie Smith's novel, the Bulgarian village becomes a place of horror occasionally brightened by comic relief. It also serves a higher and unexpected function – to strengthen the bond between two British soldiers: the Englishman Alfred Archibald Jones (Archie) and the Indian Bengali – Samad Iqbal and promote multiculturalism under the influence of the secluded place and happenings contained therein, which, given textual prominence, turn into events.

In *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*, Jeff Malpas (2006) synthesizes ideas developed by Heidegger arguing that *event* (no ordinary occurrence) is related to *place* in more meaningful ways than a mere coincidence could suggest, seeing *event* as "a disclosive happening of belonging" (p. 223) based on situatedness – that is the fact that a person's experiencing an incident at a certain place and time is indicative of their belonging to the particular place within a shorter or more prolonged temporality, which pre-determines a certain limited number of incidents resulting from their finding themselves in a situation of *being* in the place.

In view of the said above, Archie, Johnson, Samad, Dickenson-Smith and Private Mackintosh, the entire crew of the tank are placed in a situation resembling those from *Catch 22* when their tank strays off into the unnamed Bulgarian village bordering two other countries – Turkey and Greece and where it malfunctions, effectively putting an end to their official participation in the war. The congested space of the microcosm of the tank forces the cultures of the members of the crew – English (Archie) and Bengali (Samad) to come into a closer contact than usual as British subjects (Smith, 2001, p. 86) in the extreme condition of their not being able to move anywhere. The extremity of the events taking place in the tank is proportionate to that happening in the village, which, in turn, bears a similar relation to the events without – the village engulfed by a ceasing war as if in spaces contained in Russian dolls, one space containing the other and impacting it as the following passage illustrates:

So Samad and Archie went into the village and spent three hours drinking Sambucca and listening to the cafe owner tell of the miniature invasion of two Nazis who turned up in the town, ate all his supplies, had sex with two loose village girls and shot a man in the head for failing to give them directions to the next town swiftly enough (pp. 91-2).

The details of the relationships between the characters and the reasons why they have been sent to war – the desire of the Dickenson-Smiths to see their son's own blood spilled on foreign soil, thus vicariously performing heroic deeds themselves, etc. (p. 90) – can be hilarious and grotesque at the same time, containing the typical Dickensian irony, especially abundant in Dickens's presentation of the Chuzzlewit family (*Martin Chuzzlewit*) or in that of Nicholas's hypocritical uncle – Ralph (*Nicholas Nickleby*), rightfully winning Zadie Smith the title “the postmodern Dickens” for her apt use of Dickensian comedy, accents, and narratives, conferred to her by a number of newspapers among which *The Guardian*, *Washington Post* and others. In as much as she is very precise in her vivid portrayal of multicultural postmodern London through the prism of the immigrant experience, the only 23-year-old Zadie *errs* perhaps *intentionally*, when it comes to portraying local realia in foreign lands – Bulgaria, thus creating the unreal Bulgarian village. These *mishaps* become key to establishing the dystopian nature of the village the larger importance of which is instrumental in transforming Archie's and Samad's personalities and will be examined in the pages that follow.

In the quoted passage above Samad and Archie spend time in the village drinking an alcoholic drink, which in Bulgaria is known as *mastika*. It is a Greek drink also common in Bulgaria. The drink consumed by them would have been the drink known to Bulgaria and Greece, not the Italian *sambuca*, especially given the proximity of the village to the Greek border. The two drinks are made in a similar way, but *sambuca* is not the one native to Bulgaria or Greece, nor is it likely for the *sambuca* to have been imported from Italy given the fact that the village is portrayed as isolated. The two British soldiers listen to the café owner provide lots of details about recent events, but the author does not specify in what language all that information was given. It is to be assumed from the text that he did not talk to them, but to the people around, and then, however unlikely it is that he could speak English (and he does), he would have presented to his listeners this information in Bulgarian. As they have no knowledge of Bulgarian, the only way for the two to understand it would have been if he spoke in English, which is another fact that renders the place unidentifiable as it would be too much to presume that a real geographical topos could have existed where these two things could have taken place on Bulgarian territory. The strange village very soon takes on hues of horror when they return to the tank to find the rest of the crew brutally slain:

When Archie and Samad reached the tank, they found Privates Mackintosh and Johnson and Captain Thomas Dickinson-Smith dead. Johnson strangled with cheese wire, Roy shot in the back. Roy's jaw had been forced open, his silver fillings removed; a pair of pliers now sat in his mouth like an iron tongue. It appeared that Thomas Dickinson-Smith had, as his attacker moved towards him, turned from his allotted fate and shot himself in the face. The only Dickinson-Smith to die by English hands. (p. 92)

The three British soldiers die horrible deaths, the pliers in Roy's mouth likened to a tongue not unlike the biforked tongue of a snake, could symbolize

the hypocrisy of war. The dream of the Dickenson-Smiths to have their own blood spilled on foreign land comes true in a mockery at imperialism. The parody of heroic dreams and conquests for the English Crown is neatly rendered in Dickenson-Smith's death, the most unheroic imaginable – of himself shot by his own hand, thus scorning at his family's absurd imperialist ambitions. Ironically, they all die at a time when they are not engaged in a military action, in a British tank and in a Bulgarian village with war effectively over, news which is not made known to Archie and Samad until two weeks later.

As the passage above demonstrates, place, time and event are closely connected, time and place being crucial for the significance of the respective event happening to an individual. What seems to be unthinkable can occur, thus replacing the known reality with an unimaginable immediate unreality. Indeed, nothing in the village implies such a denouement in its beguiling peace and quiet, the instant transformations of place being amply exemplified in fiction by Max Blecher (2010) in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată (Adventures in Immediate Unreality)*. The fact that Samad and Archie are not in the tank makes them much more vulnerable and unshielded against an attack. They move to a place for three hours where war crimes by Nazis are discussed matter-of-factly. In the magical Bulgarian village, however, these circumstances are inverted as if under the influence of a butterfly effect, and the three soldiers die ridiculously in the protection of the tank while their unprotected peers survive. The village, being extremely strange and undefined as a location in the time of war, suggests the incapacity of the brain to process information properly when subjected to the extreme senselessness of war, the results of which are subsequent casualties of peace.

Having survived the horror of postwar peace, Samad and Archie are joined in friendship realizing that they can be united in diversity and that friendship should be based on complementariness, not on sameness, especially in times when the ingeniousness of a combination of cultures is vital for the survival of their representatives (p. 93). The insecurity of the first steps towards a mutually beneficial friendship based on two vastly different cultures is illustrated in the following passage:

As far as fixing the radio went, Samad knew how, he knew the theory, but Archie had the hands, and a certain knack when it came to wires and nails and glue. And it was a funny kind of struggle between knowledge and practical ability which went on between them as they pieced together the tiny metal strips that might save them both. "Pass me the three-ohm resistor, will you?" Archie went very red, unsure which item Samad was referring to. His hand wavered across the box of wires and bits and bobs. Samad discreetly coughed as Archie's little finger strayed towards the correct item. It was awkward, an Indian telling an Englishman what to do but somehow the quietness of it, the manliness of it, got them over it. It was during this time that Archie learnt the true power of do-it-yourself, how it uses a hammer and nails to replace nouns and adjectives, how it allows men to communicate. A lesson he kept with him all his life. (p. 93)

The two new friends are careful not to break the spell of the newly struck wonderful friendship, each one making wary steps into the other's personal space. The passage is also illustrative of the idea of intermingling cultures in the process of work on the defunct tank. In the dystopian space of the Bulgarian village postcolonial attitudes are reversed and in this aspect the novel builds up on novels such as *Passage to India* by E.M. Forster and *Maitreyi* by M. Eliade demonstrating the final stage of the English-Indian relationship in which an Englishman, Archie, is taking orders by a Bengali, Samad, originally from Bangladesh, for the simple reason that their survival depends on it, thus establishing British multiculturalism expressed in their mutual respect for each other's cultures.

The bubblegum as a product of Western culture and the green-eyed charm of Eastern culture represented by Samad added to the gruesome murders prove irresistible to the local kids, some of which speak in "careful English":

"Bubblegum! Please, mister!" By the fourth day, a gang of village children had begun to gather round the tank, attracted by the grisly murders, Samad's green-eyed glamour, and Archie's American bubblegum. "Mr. Soldier," said one chestnut-hued sparrow-weight boy in careful English, "bubblegum please thank you." Archie reached into his pocket and pulled out five thin pink strips. The boy distributed them snootily amongst his friends. (p. 94)

The village children have no excuse for speaking English other than the fact that the village remains a no-place with no identifiable location or name in which anything is possible. The foreign language they might have been able to speak in reality with some degree of fluency would have been German or Russian, not English as learning English at middle schools was not introduced until the 1950s in communist Bulgaria. French was established as a foreign language taught at schools somewhere in the 1960s and back to the days of the year 1945, English was very much unheard of in rural areas of country. By contrast, there are testimonies of eyewitnesses to the fact that locals were able to have simple conversations with retreating German troops in German and give them directions. The same holds true for Russian due to its proximity to Bulgarian rendering it intelligible to the point that Bulgarians would be able to understand it in a general conversation without any prior knowledge of the language.

The village is then rendered ambivalent as a dystopian place – unnamable and impossible to locate with occasional outbursts of violence leading to death, and as a mock utopian place – offering long spells of peaceful life in a period when Samad and Archie should be at war. The mock utopian character of the place is contained in the fact that war has been over since the two British subjects entered the village but remains unknown to them until two weeks later.

The following passage is indicative of a further cultural interaction between the two British soldiers resulting from the divine nonchalance of the information delay:

"I'm a Muslim," said Samad, pushing a plate of pork away. "And my Rita Hayworth leaves me only with my own soul." "Why don't you eat it?" said Archie, guzzling his two chops down like a madman. "Strange business, if you ask me." "I don't eat it for the same reason you as an Englishman will never truly satisfy a woman." "Why's that?" said Archie, pausing from his feast. "It's in our cultures, my friend." (pp. 96-7)

Further discussions on culture reveal more differences between the two characters, but also similarities arising from the fact that they are both British hence they do not particularly care about making friends in the foreign country. They do not attribute any special value to their own friendship at first, either, as Zadie Smith observes with poignancy, that they think of it as a friendship formed while they are somewhere else, not home, for a short period of time allowing for class and color to be crossed out as factors. In the cultural exchange that ensues, mainly with Archie consuming Samad's cultural revelations, the latter suggests that English culture is male chauvinist ignoring women's sexual desires and, thus rendering female sexual satisfaction impossible to which Archie has no defensive arguments, but his curiosity is aroused and after the war, he opts for intercultural marriage, first to an Italian woman, a waitress in a bar, who seduces him with the foamy head of a cappuccino (p. 11), which she serves him with grace and in which he seems to see W. Stevens's *concupiscent curds*² – an invitation to carnal pleasures. As Samad's insightful diagnosis of Archie's inability to respond to women's desire, proves to be a long-term prognosis of sexual impotence, his Italian wife Ophelia Diagilo divorces him and causes him to plunge into an even bolder conjugal experiment marrying a black Jamaican woman – Clara Bowden, 30 years younger than him.

The Bulgarian village, which turns out to be a small town with 3 bars, becomes aware of the fact that war is over a week and a half later, but the local residents feel disinclined to *break* the news to the two British soldiers with whom they have been engaged in cultural bartering since their arrival, which is the first suggestion made that there is a communication problem between the local Bulgarians and the British soldiers, that is, the British soldiers could not have learned about the Nazis' *mini invasion* by just listening to what people said as obviously they did not understand the language in which that news was announced. It was because of the same reason that they could not learn about the end of the war with the delay of a week and a half.

The strangeness of the Bulgarian village as a dystopian place presupposes potential lurking danger, which may be a threat to their lives and not knowing that war is over, Samad decides to cement his friendship with Archie indulging in more cultural revelations (p. 99). Archie learns that in Samad's ancestry line there is a true hero whereas he can boast only "good English stock" (p. 101). The precarious situation in which they think they are, being ignorant of the fact that the war is over, necessitates cementing their friendship, which is made possible by

² A reference to Wallace Stevens's poem "The Emperor of Ice Cream".

Archie's deeper understanding of Indian culture after the week and a half of being stranded in the Bulgarian village (pp. 100-1).

The two British soldiers take to sleeping in a missionary church, the religious message of which sinks in with Samad in a postmodern transformation of ecclesiastical space effectuated by means of consuming morphine left from the time when the church underwent another transformation – of a hospital before its latest one – of a dormitory for British soldiers, thus providing a postmodern solution to the dilemma of Jasper's double life (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) – of a London opium den visitor, and of a choirmaster in the Cathedral of Cloisterham, bringing the two mutually exclusive spaces into one locked in dystopia. The final cementation of Archie and Samad's friendship is realized in their seeking the meaning of life in a final war-time, innocent-of-peace discussion, and while Samad reads Archie like an open book, justly recognizing his lack of sexual experience, he tries to warn him not to resort to masturbation, something that later on, ironically, in postwar England, befalls him as his fate since he experiences more frustrations than his lifelong friend in intercultural relationships, unable to surmount religious obstacles playing on a psychological level. Intercultural exchange between them turns into an interreligious one, too evoking T.S. Eliot's (1948) claim of religion being closely related to culture in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* as Samad bridges religions claiming that in the final revelation of people's lives - the final activity performed by them on earth, will speak for itself and religious affiliation will be largely disregarded in the significance of this action (pp. 103-4).

Once that their friendship has been sealed in the multifunctional church, another miraculous representation of space in the dystopian space of the Bulgarian village, they are awoken by the noise of a travelling circus featuring Hitler's moustache in the shape of short black twigs stuck on to potatoes. They learn about the end of the war in its representation by a circus as moustached potato heads in a final mockery at the war effort and its lack of sense. However, it has done at least one good thing, establishing the friendship of two men from vastly different cultures, British soldiers whose dystopian experience in Bulgaria is instrumental in their identifying their cultural differences, but also similarities in the self-imposed conclusion that all people are the same, being human beings and that religion or culture are external factors, which may set them apart, but also bring them together in a celebration of cultural diversity, expressive of the symbolic title of the novel – people's *teeth* being the same, flashing *white* in dark spaces if their owners are color people, thus making themselves and the culture they represent visible.

Samad's cultural experience of the war was supposed to make him a hero so he could identify with his famous ancestor – his great-grandfather – Mangal Pande, go back to Delhi and substantially increase his chances of charming the girl that has been promised him in marriage so he jumps to the opportunity, having presented itself with the arrival of the Russians who announce the end of the war for everyone to hear, but are eager to capture the French Nazi scientist, who is

supposed to be hiding in the village – Dr Perret, also known as Dr. Sick. Samad covers his identity as a private, assumes the false identity of the dead captain – Dickenson-Smith and wearing his uniform, restores, at least in the admiring eyes of Archie, its heroic halo sullied by the cowardly act of the real captain's shooting himself dead in error. Samad then leads the international expedition as the highest-ranking officer composed of two British soldiers – himself and Archie, eight Russians, two Bulgarians – Gozan, the café owner and his nephew.

The Bulgarian village as a place impotent of war is realized once again in their mission *hilarious* in which befriending the English-speaking owner of the café has borne good fruit and he has been bribed into silence not disclosing the truth about the two British soldiers' rise in rank (p. 111). The truth about the end of the war made in the village as a place of miracles finally dawns on Samad in the lucidity of morphine taking aftereffects as he realizes that he will have to drop all pretenses very soon. He feels "crippled" (p. 114) and is literally crushed by the realization that he will have to think of a postwar identity for himself. "Sam", the English version of Samad is too offensive to his ears. He cannot return to India as an Englishman, nor can he go back to England as an Indian (p. 114). Samad's preoccupation with glory and honor arises from his eastern cultural background, which is countered by Archie's English pragmatism as they discuss Samad's bleak postwar future:

"What am I good for, Jones? If I were to pull this trigger, what will I leave behind? An Indian, a turncoat English Indian with a limp wrist like a faggot and no medals that they can ship home with me." He let go of Archie and grabbed his own collar instead. "Have some of these, for God's sake," said Archie, taking three from his lapel and throwing them at him. "I've got loads." "And what about that little matter? Do you realize we're deserters? Effectively deserters? Step back a minute, my friend, and look at us. Our captain is dead. We are dressed in his uniforms, taking control of officers, men of higher rank than ourselves, and how? By deceit. Doesn't that make us deserters?" (p. 115)

This obsession with honor prompts Samad to action resulting in the capture of Dr. Sick effectuated with Samad in the front lines emboldened by continual morphine intake and the fact that in a remorseful recap of his miserable war present and grim postwar future he has been holding the muzzle of his gun in his mouth about to commit suicide (p. 117). This act of desperation, resulting from a perceived looming loss of cultural identity in postwar England, is to have its repercussions in the transmitted cultural influence from Samad to Archie at the opening of the novel in 1975, when, 30 years later, Archie is to attempt to put an end to his life himself by inhaling exhaust fumes from his car in front of a butcher's shop in recognition of his failed first intercultural marriage. The spiral effect of multiculturalism, as Zadie Smiths suggests, manifests itself in help given at a place in the past with the reward postponed, waiting to be received in the future, as Archie is saved by the shop owner, an immigrant, who accidentally opens his shop a bit earlier to receive meat. Dystopian distortions of known notions and things rife in the Bulgarian village continue playing an important role in the

frenetic rhythm of multifaceted multicultural London where each inhabitant has brought along with him all previous cultural history, thus rendering the big city unpredictable by inverting the symbolic roles of representations of space such as the butcher's shop whose owner not only saves Archie from death, but also presents an occasion of meeting Archie's second wife, a much bolder intercultural experiment. It involves an interracial relationship, thus an established friendship with a person from another culture pays off much later in life with even deeper cultural revelations. As Dickensian atmosphere of character portrayal does not seem to wear off London, the butcher shop owner enacts a postmodern interpretation of the community of *Bleeding-Heart Yard* in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* referring to the miraculously inversed purpose of his shop – “the business of bleeding” – killing (p. 11) transformed into saving from death enacted by early-rising hard-working immigrants in the postmodern metropolis.

The Frenchman is himself transformed in the village having reinstalled little France in his abode and having developed his passion for art, painting the Bulgarian countryside, thus recreating the surroundings from the village in a 180-degree panoramic view on the walls. The war in all the actions arising from it is shown to misfire in the dystopian Bulgarian village as the village itself transforms all its inhabitants transient or local, thus the place determines the events happening there reversing standard scales as demonstrated by the case of British soldiers killed in the security of the tank in time of peace, the two British soldiers – Samad and Archie striking a lifelong friendship, the French Nazi turning to art, the local residents of the village speaking decent English, etc.

The surviving Brits are determined to gather up some heroism in an afterwar effort to capture the French Nazi, who turns out to be a young man of no more than 25 years of age with a penchant for art, a possible inversed reincarnation of Hitler himself, who was not accepted at university as an artist and wreaked havoc on Europe in his frustration, with peace putting an end to the artistic creations of the Frenchman made possible by war. In the subsequent games of poker with the Russians and Gozan, the café owner (a non-Bulgarian name referring to a Biblical river), Samad proves to be a true master of the game and wins everything material in the area. When asked for a chance to regain their possessions by playing more games, he refuses and suggests an exchange with Dr. Sick instead for everything the Russians and the café owner have lost to him, thus war being ridiculed to the last vestige of sense in it prompting Samad to ask the eternal war question: “Why was this war fought?” (p. 121).

Willing to retain some war memories from the war connected to personal experience, Archie is challenged by his friend to prove his bravery and Englishness by shooting the French Nazi, Dr. Perret, and he pretends to do it, shooting him in the leg after driving a jeep over miles upon miles of flat land (another mishap as all the land in the borderline area shared by the three countries – Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece is invariably mountainous or hilly), Samad by comparison, at the moment when he hears the shot in the distance, kills a flesh-biting insect

on his hand in the ultimate measuring of courage during the war (p. 124). The encounter with Dr. Perret (Dr. Sick) in the spell-bound village is to have more repercussions in their lives than they can imagine. Archie is to save him yet again. This time around, the scientist is already aging, and Archie takes a bullet in the leg from Millat, an Islamic militant in a full boomerang effect (p. 542).

In her novel *White Teeth* Zadie Smith recreates an immensely rich palimpsest of interacting cultures – English, Indian, German, French, Jamaican, Italian to name but a few. They are all represented in postwar postmodern London. The Bulgarian village, where the war experience of the main characters is located, is a dystopian place with nothing connecting it to any Bulgarian realia, thus warping its spaces like a black hole and revealing all its inhabitants as their warped selves creating memories in the two Brits to which they do not wish to return in postwar London; yet it is crucial as a place producing relevant events in establishing a true sense of multiculturalism embraced by both Archie and Samad, their friendship also sealed with guilt from the war for not participating enough while in the village, establishing their Britishness as well, opposed to surrounding influences – dystopian Bulgarian, Russian, French. It is this multiculturalism exercised “at the level of the individual rather than the nation” (Bentley, 2008, p. 53) that allows Archie to go for intercultural and interracial marriages, and Samad to fall in love with a white woman, showing yet again his culturally induced indecisiveness in not acting out on his desire for her in any other way than denying his wife sex and indulging in wet dreams. Multiculturalism, finally, as it seems to be suggested by Zadie Smith, is not always a “happy” circumstance: it is pregnant with potential conflicts, misunderstandings, or frustration. It, however, renders a city, such as present-day London, so much more exciting, enthralling and ultimately, rewarding for everyone living in it offering endless possibility of cultural exchange within the same city. The idea expounded by Zadie Smith is that in the postcolonial past of London, people should realize that they contain multiculturalism in themselves – Samid – Indian Bengali, Archie, as the name suggests, Welsh despite his claim to be descending from English stock, which may also be ironically indicative of his ignorance of his background suggested by Samid while questioning his culture and sexuality in the extreme lucidity induced by morphine in the Bulgarian village church. Furthermore, Dominic Head (2002) makes the following claim:

From Smith’s perspective we are all hybrid postcolonials, biologically as well as culturally, and the pursuit of pure ethnic origins presents an artificial barrier to the hybridity that is inevitable. In *White Teeth* this hybridity is a contradictory and haphazard phenomenon, not constitutive of a facile ‘Happy Multicultural Land’ (p. 186).

Zadie Smith, indeed, sees the war as instrumental in establishing the grounds on which postwar multiculturalism is to be constructed and embraced by the generations to come. It is, also, an extreme means of cultural exchange the crucial importance of which is summed up by Samad’s cultural transformations

induced by the impact of war on him as he finally relents and is able to forgive Archie for not executing the French Nazi doctor when the well-guarded secret is finally revealed 50 years later, seeing for the first time their near-heroic experience with him as eternally rejuvenating in effectuating yet another cultural exchange – with Dr. Perret (aka Dr. Sick): “And then, with a certain horrid glee, he gets to the fundamental truth of it, the anagnorisis: This incident alone will keep us two old boys going for the next forty years. It is the story to end all stories. It is the gift that keeps on giving.” (p. 533)

By aptly using dystopia based on cultural mis-referents in the Bulgarian village as part of the war experience with two British soldiers – Archie and Samad, Zadie Smith creates a cultural space warped by dystopia, which stimulates the flourishing of postcolonial multiculturalism in the capacity acquired by all residents of the village of exploring their selves and of discovering their true identities, the good seeds of which are then to be planted in postwar London, thus helping produce a fascinating mosaic of cultures promising a brighter future for the residents of the British metropolis.

References:

- Bentley, N. (2008). *Contemporary British Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Blecher, M. (2010). *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*. București: MondoRo.
- Dickens, Ch. (1868). *Little Dorrit*. New York: Books.
- Dickens, Ch. (2007). *Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*. City of University Park: Pennsylvania State University.
- Dickens, Ch. (1990). *Nicholas Nickleby*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dickens, Ch. (1999). *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. City of University Park: Pennsylvania State University.
- Eliade, M. (2015). *Maitreyi*. București: Cartex.
- Eliot, T. S. (1948). *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd.
- Forster, E. M. (2016). *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin General UK.
- Head, D. (2002). *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Malpas, J. (2006). *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*. London: MIT Press.
- Sexton, J. (2007). Dickens' *Hard Times* and Dystopia. *Victorian Web*. <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/hardtimes/sexton1.html>. Digital.
- Smith, Z. (2001). *White Teeth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.