

“I am the sole author”:
Inauthenticity and Intertextuality in Zadie Smith’s *NW*

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This article examines the role of intertextuality in Zadie Smith’s *NW* (2012) and the novel’s questioning of authorship, authenticity and identity. Relying on intertextual and postcolonial theories, the article lays bare how Smith’s novel questions the fixity and stability of selves and how she situates herself as an inherently intertextual author disrupted by others and potentially disruptive of (post)colonial ways of being and one that plays with notions of (in)authenticity and originality. For this purpose, the article pays attention to the novel’s intertextual links with the historical case of the Tichborne claimant and Jorge Luis Borges’s fictionalisation of it in the short story “Tom Castro, the Implausible Impostor,” included in the collection *A Universal History of Infamy* (1933). Moreover, the article focuses on the theorisation of infamy, understood as the disruption of hegemonic narratives brought about by marginal characters and discourses.

Keywords: intertextuality; authenticity; authorship; postcolonialism; Zadie Smith

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“Soy la única autora”:
inautenticidad e intertextualidad en *NW* de Zadie Smith

Este artículo explora el papel de la intertextualidad en la novela *NW* (2012) de Zadie Smith y cómo esta cuestiona los conceptos de autoría, autenticidad e identidad. Basándose en teorías sobre la intertextualidad y el poscolonialismo, el artículo expone cómo la novela de Smith cuestiona la inamovilidad y estabilidad del yo y cómo la propia Smith se sitúa como una autora intertextual interrumpida por otros y potencialmente disruptiva de los

modos de ser (pos)coloniales, una autora que juega con las nociones de lo (in)auténtico y lo original. Para ilustrar este propósito, el artículo presta atención al vínculo intertextual entre la novela, el caso Tichborne y la ficcionalización de este último en la historia corta “El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro” de Jorge Luis Borges, incluida en la colección *Historia Universal de la Infamia* (1933). Asimismo, este artículo se centra en la teorización de la infamia, entendida como un modo de irrupción de los personajes y discursos marginales en las narrativas hegemónicas.

Palabras clave: intertextualidad; autenticidad; autoría; poscolonialismo; Zadie Smith

I. INTRODUCTION

Intertextuality, for Julia Kristeva ([1969] 1980) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986), brings to the fore the situatedness of texts within specific historical and social contexts, establishes varying degrees of interdependence and opens up a space for dialogue. In addition, intertextuality is often attributed with the potential to bring to the fore the existence of multiple truths and ways of understanding selves. Linda Hutcheon, for example, examines the connection between intertextuality and the questioning of origins, authenticity and originality, which could ultimately undermine “humanist notions of singularity and originality” and even “universality” ([1988] 2003, 172, 192). Fredric Jameson, for his part, argues that postmodernism and intertextuality help towards the rejection of “the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity whose heroic or tragic thematics are closely related to that other great opposition between alienation and disalienation” ([1991] 1997, 12). An inherently postmodern trait that foregrounds questions of interdependence and connectedness and has a wilful potential for democratisation, intertextuality has remained a prominent feature of post-postmodernism, metamodernism and the various other labels that account for experimental contemporary fiction.¹

In postcolonial fiction, intertextuality seems to convey a very conscious interrogation of the sociocultural and political contexts in which texts are produced. The study of intertextuality in postcolonial narratives attests to the aesthetic and political possibilities not only of “writing back” in response to canonical and colonial fictions, but also of dismantling the boundaries between high and low culture as well as between different cultures in global contexts. The rewriting of and allusions to canonical texts allow for a necessary exploration and critique of complex political and sociocultural scenarios and open up a discussion on how we relate to other traditions and other people. Susanne Reichl sees intertextuality, and more particularly a form of “transcultural intertextuality,” as a common trait of Black British writing that aims to move “intercultural fiction” from margin to centre (2002, 44-45). For Zoë Wicomb, intertextuality in postcolonial texts has a “transformative” power since it responds to colonial texts and, more importantly, “asks the reader to reflect on indeterminate meanings produced by citations, meanings that destabilize received views” (2006, 146).

Zadie Smith’s fictions interrogate through often ambiguous and sometimes obscure intertexts and references the nature of postcolonial, Black British subjectivities and texts. From the outset of her career, Smith has included in her novels references to both

¹ Post-postmodernism and metamodernism are understood as reactions to both the modernist and postmodernist periods and to the cultural logic of capitalism in our current global context. Although sometimes used indistinctively (Yousef 2017, 37), post-postmodernism is generally understood as a surpassing of postmodernism and a moving away from “high postmodernism” towards “hopeful visions of community within global capitalism and moral relativism” (Doyle 2018, 259). Metamodernism, on the other hand, is understood as a return to modernism that also “emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern” (Akker and Vermeulen 2017, 5), but is “characterized by an oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment” (Vermeulen and Akker 2010, n.p.).

high and popular culture and played with intertextual allusions to Western and non-Western forms of literary, cinematic, musical, artistic and philosophical expression. *White Teeth* (2000) contains references to popular films and music as well as to academic, philosophical and scientific questions—*Star Wars* (Lucas 1977-1983), *GoodFellas* (Scorsese 1990), Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990), Plato's *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BCE) (2005), Zeno's paradoxes and Freudian psychoanalysis. *The Autograph Man* (2002) is teeming with references to classical and contemporary films, Hollywood actors and culture, popular music and comedians—*Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein 1925), *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941), *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976), *Ghostbusters* (Reitman 1984), Marlon Brando, Lenny Bruce, Ava Gardner, Buster Keaton and Madonna, as well as references to Zen Buddhism. *On Beauty* (2005) is conceived as a homage to E. M. Forster's *Howards End* ([1910] 2012), in which popular and diasporic culture are connected to the academic environment of the novel. Smith's rewriting of Forster has been the focus of most studies of intertextuality in her work, while some others have paid further attention to this novel's subtext of Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999)—see, for example, Gen'ichiro Itakura (2011), Dorothy J. Hale (2012) and Alexander Dick and Christina Lupton (2013). Several publications focus on *On Beauty*'s emphasis on the possibilities of connection with regard to form and the plot's weaving of personal relations—see, for example, Kanika Batra (2010), Ann Marie Adams (2011), Christian Moraru (2011) and Fiona Tolan (2013). Catherine Lanone (2007) and Alberto Fernández-Carbajal (2016) have also studied Smith's incorporation of musical, pictorial and media intertexts, which are seen as modernising her hypotexts and as attempts at forging bonds of solidarity between classes, communities and cultural traditions.

NW (2012), Smith's fourth novel, follows the lives of four main characters: Leah Hanwell, Keisha Blake—who eventually renames herself Natalie—Felix and Nathan Bogle. These characters are connected by their place of origin—North West London and the council estate of Caldwell—and develop very different views about the fixed adscription to preconceived ideas about place, class, race and gender, as well as different strategies to resist the insidiousness and pervasiveness of neocolonial discourses. The novel is divided into five sections: "Visitation," "Guest," "Host," "Crossing" and, again, "Visitation." In the opening "Visitation," the narrative is focalised through Leah Hanwell, a white woman in her thirties who is struggling with the decision of whether to become a mother, and through whom readers get their first picture of the rest of the characters and the changing face of Caldwell, the estate where she herself and the other protagonists grew up. "Guest" narrates a short time in the life of Felix, a recovering addict trying to get back on his feet, who is tragically stabbed to death. "Host" focuses on Keisha and moves, as a sort of bildungsroman, from her lower-class childhood in Caldwell to her upper-middle-class adulthood, and from her identification as Keisha to her metamorphosis into Natalie. "Crossing" narrates Natalie's return to Caldwell and reveals the most conflicting aspects of her plural sense of self, in particular through her encounter with Nathan, a former neighbour and classmate. The final and brief return

to “Visitation” provides some resolution to the narratives of both Leah and Natalie. Through the five sections, Smith lays out a labyrinthine North West London in which the characters must constantly define and redefine themselves. And the construction of characters and the text itself is shaped through and through by Smith’s use of intertextuality and multiple, unstable, inauthentic identities.

From the time of its publication, *NW* has been praised for its experimentation with form, with some parts being soon compared to James Joyce’s *Ulysses* ([1922] 2011) and to Virginia Woolf’s use of stream of consciousness, as well as to other postmodernist playful narratives (Oates 2012; Wood 2012; Knepper 2013). *NW* also juxtaposes intertexts from both high and popular culture and from different cultural and social traditions. Integrated at different narrative levels—as narratorial comments, dialogue, interior monologue and paratextual elements—intertextuality turns *NW* into a complex narrative that requires a demanding act of reading. Numerous studies tackle Smith’s use of intertextuality in *NW*. James Wood highlights Smith’s “restless [...] relation with the novelistic tradition” and describes *NW* as a “decentered” novel that depicts individuals on the margins with no fixed sense of self (2012). Vanessa Guignery refers to Smith’s combination of modernist and postmodernist styles and regards intertextuality in the novel as a “joyful *mélange*” (2013, n.p.). In a later article, Guignery alludes to the “playful dimension” of *NW* and signals several of its high and popular culture references, such as Kazuo Ishiguro, John Updike, Beyoncé and Jay-Z (2014, n.p.). Nick Bentley explores the frictions between modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism and concludes that *NW* is an example of “trailing postmodernism” (2018, 2), which within the debate around post-postmodernism and metamodernism alludes to fictions that are experimental but not so much as to distance themselves from postmodernism. In his study, Bentley compares David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) with Smith’s *NW* in terms of their use of postmodernist strategies such as “fragmentation, intertextual complexity and metafictional playfulness” (2018, 13). Fernández-Carbajal also refers to *NW*’s metamodernist strategies, namely “psychological accuracy, affective detachment from totalizing ideologies and stylistic experimentation,” calls attention to the narrator’s playfulness and analyses the novel in light of Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* ([1925] 2000) (2016, 77, 80).

These previous studies shed some light on the complex narrative of *NW*, but I contend that an interrogation of Smith’s use of intertextuality in connection to her narration of origins and inauthenticity and an exploration of Smith’s own role as an author among the myriad intertexts present in the novel can provide further insight into the labyrinthine conceptualisations of selves and texts put forward in *NW*. For this purpose, this article focuses on the transformation of Keisha into Natalie and explores how the use of intertextuality reproduces and reframes the ambivalences and contradictions of her metamorphosis. More specifically, this transformation will be read in light of one particular intertext, the historical case of the Tichborne claimant and Borges’s account of this case in the short story “Tom Castro, the Implausible Impostor,”

part of his collection *A Universal History of Infamy* (1933). Both the case and the story bring to the fore the desire to become someone else in order to advance in society and the creation of fictionalised, inauthentic selves that adapt to different contexts and to the varying desires of audiences. Even though this is a rather obscure intertext, it is one that may reconfigure the meaning of (in)authenticity in its connection to Borges's idea of infamy and the disruption of dominant narratives brought about by infamous characters.

2. INTERTEXTUALITY AND AUTHORSHIP: INAUTHENTIC SELVES, INAUTHENTIC FICTIONS

The first section of *NW*, "Visitation," opens with Leah hearing on the radio the sentence "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me" (Smith 2012, 3), which is subsequently reduced to "I am the sole author," "I am the sole," "the sole" (3-4).² This phrase paves the way for the novel's examination of the construction and deconstruction of identity, a struggle between the impossibility of being anything other than that established by the circumstances of birth and society's expectations and acts of self-creation. This statement also seems to define the playful game of intertextuality that governs the narrative and might alert readers to the need to question notions of authenticity and originality in the text they are about to encounter—Smith might be the author of *NW*, but she is not the only one.

Smith, who has shown her familiarity with Roland Barthes's theories (Smith 2009a, 45-47), may be playing here with Barthes's proclamation of the death of the author. She seems to become the sriptor that Barthes conceived, a being or entity that is created "simultaneously with the text" and that "bears within [...] this immense *dictionary* from which he draws a writing that can know no halt" (Barthes 1977, 145-47; italics added). *NW* seems to invite us to question both its characters and sriptor through the dictum "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me," calling attention to how selves and texts must be understood as fictions that can never emerge in isolation and that will thus never be original or authentic. Indeed, Barthes asks readers to conceive any text as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1977, 46). Nevertheless, while in *NW* Smith presents numerous intertexts that "blend and clash" her narrative with and against others, there are references to her previous works and narratorial commentaries that, even if somewhat lost amongst many other voices, remind us of her authorial presence.

There are two notable examples of this presence in the text. The first one is the reference to number 37. Some studies have attempted to decipher the meaning of this number in *NW*, which is randomly used as the title for certain sections in the

² The phrase is also used as the title of two numbered sections in "Host" that narrate the transformation of Keisha into Natalie, through which the novel explores in more detail the possibilities and limitations of such acts of self-creation and metamorphosis.

first “Visitation” and in other parts of the novel refers to house and bus numbers. Guignery remarks anecdotally that this was Smith’s age at the time of publication of *NW* and reads the discontinuity of the number 37 sections in “Visitation” as a break of linearity and as an instance of postmodernist playfulness, going as far as to suggest that it may also be connected to “the Victorians’ fondness of coincidences” (2014, n.p.). The number 37 was also the protagonist’s flat number in Smith’s earlier novel *The Autograph Man*. This may elicit a reading in line with Guignery’s contention about coincidences, but I would argue instead that the significance of 37 in *NW* may be connected to the randomness attributed to it in *The Autograph Man*, whose protagonist explains that “when people are asked to choose a number between one and a hundred, most people choose 37” (Smith 2002, 297). This seems to be more in tune with Leah’s concerns about the arbitrariness of life events in the novel. In a similar manner, I would argue that the sentence “But *Irie* was always going to be that kind of mother, [...] I could have told you that five years ago” (2012, 299; italics added) connects *NW* to *White Teeth*, which at the end imagines Irie, one of its youngest protagonists, as a mother to a child with two potential fathers, the twins Magid and Millat. Examples such as these, which share the common multiverse of Smith’s North London fictions, entangle her writings and assert her voice within the labyrinthine web of intertexts with other authors, thus making it clear that, as Barthes contended, the act of reading implies disentanglement rather than deciphering (1977, 147).

Smith’s authorial presence in *NW* moves beyond mere calls to the readers—the narrator exclaims, “Reader: keep up!” in the “Host” section (227)—and asks them to recognise her as one author amongst many. Through the way in which she constructs and deconstructs her own works of fiction and the way she engages with other authors, Smith places herself ambiguously both as writer and sriptor, as the (in)authentic writer of *NW*. Smith irrupts into the text and disrupts her own fiction, and the tension between authorial presence and the effacement that the high level of intertextuality implies reinforces the ambiguities and tensions that underpin the characters’ identities, particularly in the case of Keisha/Natalie, who constructs her *selves* as fiction/friction.

Postcolonial theory has long reflected on the struggle between authenticity and inauthenticity, a colonial binarism that persists in contemporary times. Bill Ashcroft et al. connect authenticity to the shortcomings and possibilities of essentialism against colonial discourses and the dangers of stereotyping (2000, 17-18). Homi K. Bhabha elaborates upon hybrid identities as “resistance against dominant colonial power,” which will always claim its inherent authenticity against others (1994, 23). Vincent J. Cheng explores why global societies that have for decades dismantled fixed and essentialist notions of self “still cling to notions of authenticity and authentic identities” and concludes that this may be connected to anxieties “about the perceived loss of identity and subjectivity” (2004, 3, 6). Discourses around (in) authenticity can thus unveil the anxieties derived from lack of representation and/or misrepresentation and the assimilation that racial, ethnic and class hegemonies still

enforce, as well as the anxieties that arise when confronted with forms of otherness that destabilise normative identities.

Although there are many intertextual references throughout *NW*, they are found with most frequency in the “Host” and “Crossing” sections. As Guignery indicates, most of the references to “canonical literature” are found in Keisha’s narrative, always alongside references to popular culture (2014, n.p.). Guignery argues that this disparate “accumulation” of references “form[s] a fairly coherent whole,” a series of crossings that enable connectedness in global times (2014, n.p.). She admits, though, that it “make[s] one breathless” (2014, n.p.), and I would further argue that such breathlessness actually implies a certain anxiety that affects both characters and readers. While I agree with Guignery’s contention that there is no anxiety of influence in *NW* but rather a continuation of the “literary echo chamber” set up by Smith’s previous novels (2013, n.p.), I suggest that the anxieties that the text reveals do not allow for the “joyful *mélange*” she sees in the novel (2013, n.p.). The intertexts of the novel continuously construct and deconstruct Keisha/Natalie and thus, at the level of the character, there is significant anxiety arising from the apparent need to transform her self into one that is better assimilated into the increasingly white, upper-middle class contexts in which her life progressively unfolds. Moreover, if, as Tobias Döring contends, in intertextual novels—especially postcolonial ones—the “anxieties lie with the reader,” who must confront the “problematic notions of literary originality and cultural containment” (2003, 6), *NW* plays with an overflowing, intense intertextuality and transmits to readers a sense of fragmentation and dislocation that parallels the anxiety of origins that Smith poignantly explores.

NW shares with diasporic fiction a preoccupation with split selves and the often enforced transformations that may foster a higher level of integration or, rather, assimilation in order to succeed. But this split is always ambiguous and traces of the past selves cannot be erased. Natalie tries for many years to erase her identity as Keisha, which is tied to the immobility of Caldwell and the lower classes. In a section of “Host” titled “The Sole Author” (247–48), the novel presents this change as a metamorphosis that enables a process of “self-invention,” which starts shortly after she introduces herself as Natalie to a group of white people organising a protest at her university. The intertexts found in this section help to configure Natalie as being formed by a wide array of influences that present her as a woman who may potentially contain multitudes. However, the large amount of intertextuality in *NW* constantly reminds readers that Natalie is herself a fictional construction that is inherently inauthentic.

In one of the sections of “Host,” titled “In Drag,” Natalie ponders which character or attitude represents her “most authentic” or “least inauthentic” self (333). The construction and deconstruction of the self is seemingly presented as a multiplicity of identities from which she can choose. Nevertheless, in the section that precedes “In Drag” she is accused of being “false. Fake” (333) by a former childhood friend, while earlier on in the novel Leah had referred to her fundamental ambiguities and

contradictions as “inconsistencies” and even “hypocrisies” (70). Natalie’s choices are thus limited by the discourses built around her possible identities, and the subversive potential that feminist theories such as Judith Butler’s have attributed to performativity and drag seems to be severely curtailed in this case (Pérez Zapata 2014, 94). This unfulfilled potential for subversion, read alongside the textual construction of identity that intertextuality entails, does not speak so much about Natalie’s struggle with identity but rather about the anxieties that her multiplicity provokes in others.

NW is polyphonic both in terms of the multiplicity of voices credited to the characters and the intertextual relationships it establishes with other texts. If Bakhtin contended that “[he] live[d] in a world of others’ words” (1986, 143), *NW* reveals how “others’ words” help both to construct and deconstruct selves and texts. Natalie seems to consciously retrieve her past in order to lay bare the fragments that constitute her selfhood, and the end of the novel provides an ambiguous reconciliation, not of identities, but of voices. The last paragraph of *NW* alternates actions simultaneously performed by both Natalie and Keisha, and the last sentence alludes specifically to voices: “‘I’ve got something to tell you,’ said Keisha Blake, disguising her voice with her voice” (401). In line with postcolonial and Black British fiction, *NW* resists centric understandings of the self as whole and coherent and denounces how certain sections of British society reduce the plurality of otherness to normative singularity. Smith also explains this process in her essay “Speaking in Tongues,” in which she denounces the “present anxiety —disguised as genteel concern—for the contemporary immigrant, tragically split, we are sure, between worlds, ideas, cultures, voices—whatever will become of them? Something’s got to give—one voice must be sacrificed for the other. What is double must be made singular” (2009c, 136). Inauthentic characters and intertextual fictions thus expose the anxiety that doubleness and plurality provoke. It might be more productive, in sum, to regard authenticity in light of Jean-Paul Sartre’s argument in *Being and Nothingness* ([1943] 2003), whereby, as Andrew Webber summarises, “one kind of inauthenticity involves affirming one’s traits as though they were fixed” (2013, 140). Diasporic, hybrid subjects may thus be the more authentic or the least inauthentic.

3. BEFORE THE LAW: CLAIMING TO BE AN/OTHER

The first intertextual allusion in *NW* to the story of the Tichborne claimant appears during Keisha’s transformation into Natalie. During one of her law lectures at university, the lecturer refutes one of Frank D’Angelis’s—Natalie’s future husband—arguments about Michel de Montaigne by elaborating on the historical Tichborne claimant court case, where the witnesses failed to recognise a man. This case involved Arthur Orton, born in London to a lower-class family, who sailed for Australia in 1852 and then disappeared. By 1865 he had renamed himself Tomas Castro and, helped by a black man named Andrew Bogle, answered an advertisement claiming to be the

long-lost son of Lady Tichborne, Roger Charles Tichborne. Even though he did not resemble Tichborne in the slightest, he hoped to become the family's heir. Allegedly blinded by grief, Lady Tichborne accepted him but the family took him to court and he was condemned to ten years in prison for perjury. After he came out of prison, he spent several years telling his story to different audiences, sometimes claiming his innocence, sometimes confessing to his imposture.

The second reference to Orton appears later on in the novel: as Natalie and Nathan walk through the Caldwell estate in the novel's fourth section, significantly titled "Crossing," they find themselves opposite the cemetery Natalie came to with her youngest daughter hoping to get her to sleep and where she had unsuccessfully tried to locate Orton's grave. These two references to Orton, together with Nathan's surname being Bogle, call for an exploration of the relationship between these two stories. Moreover, taking into account the level of intertextuality in *NW*, its labyrinthine nature and Smith's knowledge of and admiration for Borges's work, I would also argue that this particular intertextual layer of *NW* can be read against the fictionalisation of the Tichborne claimant story by Borges and his theorisation of what it means to be infamous.³

In "Tom Castro, the Implausible Impostor," Borges narrates how Orton leaves his "deplorable suburb" in London ([1933] 1975a, 32) and travels first to Valparaíso and then Sydney. The short story focuses on the erasure of Orton's previous self and on how he appropriates Tichborne's memories as provided by old diaries and letters and eventually becomes his spectre. Orton is thus depicted as always in transition and as someone who will consequently have a disturbed relationship with the memories of his two identities. Borges ends his story by highlighting that, after leaving prison, Orton toured the United Kingdom and alternated his account of events between innocence and guilt, since "modesty and ingratiating were so deep-seated in him that many a night he would begin by exoneration and end by confession, always disposed to the learnings of his audience" (39). The conclusion of Borges's story does not seem to be far from Smith's idea of "in drag" and also resonates with Natalie's desire to fulfil "whatever was expected of her" (Smith 2012, 321).

Like Smith, Borges is obsessed with the idea of origins and returns, so much so that in his 1992 essay "Ideología y ficción en Borges," Ricardo Piglia labelled Borges's writing "fiction of origins" (quoted in Jenckes 2007, 2), which he connects not only to the contradictory and entangled origins of the self but also of literature. Borges's ideas about identity and self are also relevant because he repeatedly insists that there is no whole, stable self and that personality and identity are nothing but a mirage (Ramanan 2016). Kate Jenckes highlights Borges's idea of return and the "coming and going of memories"; for him, she notes, "the past is never dead, but can irrupt in the present and change the way we see the world" (2007, 28, xii). Smith and Borges share a

³ Smith's familiarity with Borges's work is apparent, for example, in "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace" (2009b), "The Tattered Ruins of the Map: On Sarah Sze's *Centrifuge*" (2018a) and "On Harlem, Hatred and Javier" (2018b).

preoccupation with memory, the impossibility of completely forgetting and erasing the past, the construction of identities and even the questioning of identity itself.

In *NW* Natalie tries to do away with the past that Caldwell represents, but it always returns in conscious and unconscious ways, altering the way she conceives her self. Even if at the end the voice of the protagonist becomes plural against the singularity of colonial discourses, the fact remains that for most of the novel she compartmentalises both identities—Keisha and Natalie—and is depicted as an impostor, her process of disconnection and forgetting seen with suspicion by characters in the novel and the narrative voice. The intertextual link with Orton's case reinforces the view of Natalie as an impostor, as someone who is prepared to forget her past and alter her very being in order to gain acceptance into a wealthier milieu, just as Orton appropriated Tichborne's memories to profit from belonging to the Tichborne family. Class is thus presented as a key element in both stories since both Orton and Natalie wish to ascend in the social scale, but cannot do so without either becoming a fraud or systematically being regarded as one. In this sense, *NW* exposes the deterministic discourses that still operate nowadays in British society—Natalie cannot be anything other than what corresponds to her by birth. And she will be regarded with suspicion even when she undergoes a process of complete assimilation into mainstream society, which is still, in many cases, not willing to accept difference. This amounts to a critique of this hegemonic society's demands for othered subjects to be "authentic," which implies that they remain the same throughout their lives—that is, attached to their disadvantaged circumstances—and do not disrupt the privileged, fixed sense of self present in dominant Western views.

The intertextual presence of Orton's story in *NW* thus strengthens the discussion of (in)authenticity and (mis)recognition in particular societal, cultural and political contexts. But while Orton was formally accused, brought before the law and condemned for perjury, Natalie is best read from the perspective of a Foucaultian form of law, since she is permanently surveying herself, and transforms and reforms herself according to the standards and expectations set by the neocolonial powers at work, which she is under the control of. Some scholars have criticised some of Michel Foucault's contentions, notably Edward Said, who, as David Murphy explains, questioned his Eurocentrism and lack of engagement with feminism and postcolonialism and "explicitly reject[ed] Foucault's pessimism about the ability to resist discourses of power" (2007, 185). *NW* is actually rather ambiguous about Natalie and continuously plays with the tension between her subjection to power and her resistance to it, which indeed raises doubts about the possibility of disrupting power that seem to partake of the pessimism to which Said alludes.

However, as I have been arguing in this article, the perception of Natalie as inauthentic could also be read as signalling disruptive possibilities on account of the anxiety it generates in others. In addition, it is necessary to further explore the potential of infamous characters as represented not only by Natalie Blake but also

by Nathan Bogle. In *NW*, Nathan is Natalie's former classmate and neighbour who has remained all his life in Caldwell. Natalie and Nathan seem to be worlds apart, yet with shared initials and a common past, Nathan compels Natalie to confront and accept her former life. When she returns to Caldwell after her husband finds out about her online double life as Keisha*NW*, and believing that she is no one, that she has no self to be, she is "hailed" by Nathan, who recognises her as Keisha. Nathan irrupts in Natalie's narrative and disrupts her belief in a complete rejection of the past. This disruption is a step towards the novel's resolution of Natalie's plural self, because through Nathan she is able to better remember who she was and acknowledge that that self is still very much present. Thus, the dissolution of the self she wishes for at one point during her "crossing" can only be resolved through the intersection and integration of selves and of past and present.

Nathan's role is key in the configuration not only of Natalie's narrative, but also of the concept of infamy. In Orton's case, Bogle was originally a slave from Jamaica who ended up in Sydney and seemingly helped him commit the crime of perjury, although he was later cleared of any charges (Jaffee 1935). In Borges's story, Bogle is the black servant who plans everything, but ends up dying on his way to Primrose Hill when he is violently run over, and will be forgotten by history. In *NW*, Nathan Bogle has been ruined by circumstance and is confronted with a different type of slavery and oppression, that imposed by the racism of neocolonial, neoliberal societies. In addition, Nathan's relationship to Natalie bears yet another resemblance to Orton's story, because he is also depicted in the role of helper to the protagonist. After Nathan talks about dreams and quotes from Jay-Z's "Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City," Natalie tells him that he "sound[s] like the Magic Negro" (Smith 2012, 381). Kwame Anthony Appiah explains that the Magic Negro is a stereotypical cinematic figure that helps white characters to overcome difficulties (1993, 80-81). Even if she employs the term ironically and complainingly, Natalie unconsciously presents herself as "white" or, at least, as somebody who has acquired all the economic and moral privileges stereotypically associated with whiteness. And Nathan, from her perspective, is just a secondary character that will help her to build a new sense of self.

Nathan becomes an infamous character, in a Borgesian sense. As Jenckes points out, the Greek origin of "infamy" makes reference to "an utterance or report" but ultimately refers to "that which is absent from history by definition, that which cannot be told" (2007, 78). Thus, infamy can point to the disruptive potential of subaltern stories that have been suppressed by socioeconomic and cultural discourses of power. In Natalie's narrative, Nathan becomes an "infame," an ex-centric character who feels bitterly unloved by his society. In fact, Guignery considers Nathan as a "ghost" on a par with Shar, another former classmate who comes begging to Leah's door and who further accuses Natalie of being a coconut, which negatively alludes to Black and Asian British subjects who "look dark on the outside but feel white on the inside" (2014, n.p.). Guignery further points out that Nathan is "an outcast who appears furtively

in each section” and sees this recurrence as Smith’s chosen mode of representation for a marginal character who cannot freely move in his society (2014, n.p.). Indeed, *NW* leaves Nathan out of its central narrative: the first section is devoted to Leah, the second to Felix, the third to Natalie, and his role in the fourth, “Crossing,” is depicted as secondary. Nevertheless, Nathan is involved in all the others’ stories and memories and his presence and language disrupt their accounts, especially for Natalie. Nathan becomes a constant reminder of how hegemonic society has failed those at its margins and his presence highlights the continuity and pervasiveness of the power dynamics that aim to keep such other, disruptive subjects in place. This reading can, furthermore, be connected to Borges’s configuration of infamy. As Jenckes reminds us, stories such as Bogle’s as recounted by Borges represent “lives and times that are left out of dominant narratives [and thus] have the ability to interrupt those narratives, forcing us to acknowledge the structures of exclusion on which they are based” (2007, xii). Even if in *NW* he is treated as a secondary character, or precisely because he is, Nathan disrupts not only the narratives of other characters but also those hegemonic voices that insist on keeping subjects like him silent and immobile.

4. CONCLUSION: CROSSING TEXTS AND SELVES

The intertextual crossings of *NW* with other novels in general, and with Borges’s story “Tom Castro, the Implausible Impostor” in particular, help to reconfigure Natalie and Nathan’s physical and psychic crossings. *NW* makes evident the many barriers that more often than not make such crossings impossible, but it also nevertheless leaves some space for them to be transgressed. If intertextuality may at times provide some connectedness, in *NW* there is a clash between the idea of connective intertextuality and the characters’ struggle to make such connections and the impossibility of actually attaining them.

By conceiving of Natalie as an impostor and Nathan as infamous, *NW* brings to the fore the disruptive potential of infamy. Albeit in a rather ambiguous form, by the end of the novel Natalie is able to simultaneously inhabit the centre and the margins of British society, thus dismantling essentialist views of identity. The structure of the final “Visitation” section and the novel’s questioning of (in)authenticity and identity make of Natalie a collection of fragments that do away with the idea of the self as singular and coherent. The novel, however, does not offer a hopeful future for Nathan, who becomes a haunting presence that denounces the political abandonment of those at the margins and, in his role as an infamous character, emphasises their under- and misrepresentation.

Intertextuality and infamy complement each other since both are conceived as an irruption of the past and otherness into the different layers of the story. In this regard, the use of intertextuality has a mnemonic function since it not only forces us to remember, sometimes through arduous archaeological paths, but also helps to

configure the characters' relationship to their pasts and origins and the (in)authenticity of their postcolonial identities in the glocal context of North West London. *NW* portrays identities as fictions that can be constructed and deconstructed, and Smith similarly signals that she conceives of fiction as inherently inauthentic by intertextually connecting her writing with that of others and establishing herself as an author who embraces and promotes the use of inauthenticity as a mode of resistance.

Reading, for Smith, is a "creative act" in which author and reader intertwine in "a quest for meaning," a meaning that can never be fixed and determinant (2009a, 43, 56). *NW* is an inauthentic novel that forces readers to confront instability, fluidity and ambiguity and is thus an infamous text, full of fragmentation, irruptions and disruptions that move beyond the text, question the limitations of hegemonic, colonial ways of being and open up a space to inhabit the multiplicity and ambiguity of the margins and challenge the legitimacy of the centre. However, the inaccessibility—or obscurity—of some of the intertextual references in the novel parallels the emphasis that the narrative lays on physical and metaphorical barriers—the estate where the characters grew up is surrounded by a wall and they are kept in place by the barriers constructed around class, race and gender. Thus, even if the novel's intertextuality may allow readers to glimpse the possibility of a higher level of connectedness for its rather isolated characters, for the characters themselves the struggle with the physical and psychological boundaries that their context imposes lays bare that there are still many crossings to be made.

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Received 20 December 2019

Revised version accepted 26 March 2020

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