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White Teeth

The book is titled *White Teeth* for a reason. The whole concept of teeth is mentioned pretty frequently throughout the book, especially in the first part. One can interpret the title itself and mentioning of the teeth in many ways.

First of all, teeth symbolize people. They are with people their whole life and even chapters in the book named like “Teething trouble”, Molars, “Canines: The Ripping Teeth”. For example, in “Canines” we can observe how Chalfense family almost ripping Jones’s and Iqbal’s children apart, their influence is pretty strong.

There is also a clich  that black and brown people have extremely white teeth, opposed to the colour of their skin. Thus we see that, of course, Zadie Smith writes about immigrants, which is one of the main and significant topics of the novel. There is usually a conflict

between the first and the second generations of immigrants. The first generation is trying to forget their roots, merge with locals, but the second generation, on the opposite, are usually eager to know more about their roots.

Roots are also a part of the teeth and there are chapters in the book like “The Root Canals of Mangal Pande”, which give us insight on the origins of the characters. It also develops the topic of the heritage. Samad sent Magid to his homeland because he wanted him to remember his roots, traditions. And after the phrase ‘false teeth floating silently to the bottom of the glass’ is used. It is actually repeated throughout the novel several times. There is also an allusion to the corruption of eastern people by western values. When talking about smoking in Millat’s school, the author says “the stuff that turns white teeth yellow”, thus pointing out that teeth, compared here to eastern immigrants, are corrupted and spoiled. Even when Poppy gives Samad a toothbrush, while his sons are watching him with their white teeth could be a signal for him to “whiten his teeth” to clean himself from that affair, that corruption that caused it.

There are cases in the book when people lose teeth. Clara loses her upper teeth in a scooter accident and after that she rejected Jehovah’s Witnesses. After Indira Gandhi’s death there are “teeth, teeth everywhere, scattered throughout the land, mingling with dust”. In both cases we can see the situation where people lose something that was before important for them: faith, heritage, roots, humanity.

The teeth are also associated with genes. The teeth, the people are changing. And just as Samad and Archie tried to control their children’s growth, Marcues Chalfen tried to control the growth of the FutureMouse by manipulating genes. Archie’s phrase in the end proves it.

There is a reference to rodent’s teeth when the author mentions that Clara and Irie had buck teeth, thus connecting the aforementioned concept of White Teeth with FutureMouse.

As we can see, there is a lot of symbolic meaning in the title of the novel, from the concept of the family roots to the connection with

gene manipulation, which are cleverly given throughout the novel.