The Afterlives of Narratives:

Adaptation and Appropriation in British Theatre and Performance

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Edited by

Uğur Ada

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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To my beloved parents,
Aysel & Hüseyin ADA
as a gratitude for your sacrifices and faith in me.

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Adapting Trauma in Theatre: A Study of *White Teeth* at the Kiln Theatre
Önder Çakirtaş

The adaptation of Zadie Smith's seminal novel *White Teeth* (2000) for the stage, reimagined by the distinguished playwright Stephen Sharkey and under the stewardship of Artistic Director Indhu Rubasingham, made its highly anticipated world premiere in 2018 at Kiln Theatre. This chapter aims to examine how the multifaceted immigrant experience in Smith's literary work is transposed onto the stage by Sharkey, particularly focusing on the ways in which the theatrical adaptation navigates key elements of the original narrative, such as its thematic core, dramatic structure, and character dynamics. Additionally, this chapter delves into the methodologies employed to preserve the essence of the novel while allowing for a unique theatrical interpretation. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of both the script and its stage execution, this study seeks to uncover the complex relationship between the source material and its adaptation, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on intercultural themes and the fidelity of adaptations.

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Bernadette Cronin

This chapter considers aspects of the process of translating and adapting for stage Marlen Haushofer's novella *Wir töten Stella*, published in 1958 by the post-war Austrian author. After discussing the motivations for and the suitability of the material for adaptation, I reflect on the question of translation – here used also as a metaphor for adaptation – as transcodification from the narrative medium to that of live performance, from a plurality of perspectives: that of the translator, the script writer, the devisor-collaborator, and the actor performing the character. The latter inevitably entails a consideration of the specific experience of shifting between 'outside' and 'inside' in the creative process, between writing a

script in the creation phase and then letting go, becoming unknowing, to be able to inhabit and embody the role moment to moment with the help of the actor's "mysterious psychic chemistry" (Brook 1968, 33). I refer to Lawrence Venuti's translation theory as a broad framework for my discussion. Finally, drawing on contemporary discourses that interrogate terminology and categorisation, I seek to situate the piece of theatre that emerged from the translation and adaptation process – *KILLING STELLA* – within the increasingly broad field of Adaptation Studies.

Chapter Three
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Clare Summerskill

In all areas of research based on interviews with living people, ethical concerns relating to appropriation, exploitation, representation and working methods are inevitably foregrounded. A verbatim piece of theatre is an artistic creation rather than a research method but the content of the script is secured by interviewing living people and, therefore, matters relating to the treatment of the contributors and to the representation of those who share their stories or experiences for a dramatic endeavour must be scrutinised through an ethical lens. Because of the lack of guidelines in this work, both ethical and practical, theatre practitioners will inevitably operate in different ways when it comes to approaching their contributors, securing permissions, and determining what level of engagement – if any - they might have in the production process after they have been interviewed. Turning to core tenets of feminist interview discourse including reciprocity, the identification of power imbalances, positionality, and the concept of co-production, this chapter explores how benefits can be attained for contributors and risks of exploitation mitigated in the appropriative action of theatre makers' employment of 'real' people's stories.

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Graham Saunders

In March 2000 the playwright Harold Pinter completed a screenplay adaptation of King Lear. Commissioned by the actor and director Tim Roth, the project was to have been made by the production company Film Four, but funding issues led to its abandonment. To date, Pinter's screen version has received little scholarly attention, and what has been written dismissive,

describing it as faithful adaptation...[but] too much so' and 'a costume drama rendition'. In this paper I want to defend Pinter's screenplay by drawing on Jack Jorgen's influential definitions of Shakespearian cinema in his 1977 book Shakespeare on Film to argue that Pinter's adaptation belongs firmly within the Realist / Filmic mode rather than the Theatrical. Drawing primarily on archival materials held at the Harold Pinter Archive at the British Library, the paper will look at some of the key changes that Pinter makes - changes that while owing a debt in part to Peter Brook's 1971 film adaptation, is in several respects an innovative and surprising contribution to Shakespeare's screen life.

Chapter Five
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Bernadette Cochrane

This chapter argues that twenty-first-century British theatrical adaptation is increasingly characterised by technologically sophisticated, systemically oriented, and transmedially inflected practices. Focusing on four case studies—The Tempest, Dream, ABBA Voyage, and Stranger Things: The First Shadow—it demonstrates that adaptation today must be understood as a dynamic process of infrastructural, aesthetic, and experiential transformation. The chapter situates contemporary adaptation within broader paradigms of media convergence, participatory spectatorship, and platformed cultural production, showing how British theatre has moved beyond textual reinterpretation toward systemic recalibrations of performance conditions, narrative forms, and audience engagement. Productions such as The Tempest and Dream exemplify a shift toward digitally integrated dramaturgy, while ABBA Voyage and The First Shadow illustrate how adaptation now operates within expansive transmedia ecosystems. Across these examples, adaptation emerges not merely as a creative act but as a mode of systemic, cross-platform storytelling that demands new models of theatrical experience. The chapter concludes that technologically sophisticated adaptations in British theatre reimagine the very conditions of liveness, authenticity, and cultural memory, reshaping theatrical practice to meet the participatory and algorithmically modulated cultures of the twenty-first century.

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Sarah Byrne

Despite the name, Livecasting is an umbrella term that refers to the filming and broadcast of live theatre into cinemas or similar big screen venues, both simultaneous and pre-recorded. Since the 2009 launch of National Theatre Live, this hybrid medium has seen increasing popularity in the UK. With the COVID 19 pandemic and lockdowns necessitating more remote modes of engagement, livecasting's popularity has translated into an increase in livecasts finding an afterlife on specialised theatre streaming platforms such as National Theatre at Home. The focus of this chapter is how elements of the live theatre experience communicated through filming techniques remain even when the spectatorial context is radically different than originally intended. The two specific elements this chapter will explore in detail are immersion and liveness. Both can be characterised as key to the medium identity of theatrical performances and so their afterlives in cinematic broadcast, archives and streaming services reveals a multi-dimensionality to the remediation processes.

Chapter Seven
Women Will Not Be Silenced in Sarah Grochala's Intelligence
María Herrera Cárdenas

This chapter examines *Intelligence*, the award-winning play by Sarah Grochala, as a powerful response to the underrepresentation of women in contemporary British theatre. Despite progress, only 26% of new plays in the UK in 2018 were written by women, highlighting the ongoing struggle for visibility and legitimacy. Grochala channels her "deep rage and frustration" into a narrative centred on Ada Lovelace—pioneer of computer software—whose genius was historically overlooked in a male-dominated scientific world. Through a close analysis of Grochala's bold narrative structure and inventive use of adaptation, this study explores how the playwright reclaims historical and cultural narratives to assert women's presence and achievements. Grochala not only adapts Lovelace's story but appropriates traditional theatrical forms to challenge patriarchal legacies and affirm women's intellectual authority on stage. By situating *Intelligence* within broader discourses on adaptation and appropriation, the chapter contributes to rethinking how these strategies can be employed to legitimise women's voices in 21st-century theatre.

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Uğur Ada is currently working as Assistant Professor Doctor at Tokat Gaziosmanpasa University in Türkiye. He holds a Ph.D. degree and his dissertation is entitled "Theatre in Education and the Analysis of Edward Bond's Big Brum Plays within the Context of Theatre in Education". His research areas are Contemporary British Theatre, Applied Theatre/Drama, In-Yer-Face Theatre, and Theatre and Young People. He authored *Eğitimde Tiyatro/Theatre in Education (TiE)* (2021, PEGEM), and edited *Edward Bond: Bondian Drama and Young Audience* (2023, Vernon Press) and British Theatre and Young People: Theory and Performance in the 21st Century (2025, Routledge).

Sarah Byrne completed her PhD at the University of Reading in the summer of 2024. Her thesis *Both Grand & Intimate: UK Livecasting From 2009 to Now* is a comprehensive, interdisciplinary examination of the modern era of filming and broadcasting live theatre into cinemas. Her work has been shared in journals and at conferences including *Connessioni Remote*, BAFTSS and Live Xinema IV. Sarah's other research interests include participatory modes of engagement, the soft boundaries in between media and qualitative research in the creative industries. She has recently co-authored a paper on the challenges facing freelancers in the UK film and TV industries as part of the Screen Industry Voices project. *Freelancers: Building Workforce Resilience For Growth In The UK Film And Television Industries* is available to read now.

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Collaborative Art: Process and Practice (ed., Palgrave 2020), and voice: *Kristin Linklater* (2023) Routledge Performance Practitioners Series. She is currently working on an edited case study collection, *Intercultural Processes, Practices, and Perspectives: Co-creating playing 'the maids'* (Methuen Drama).

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Graham Saunders is the Allardyce Nicoll Professor of Drama in the Department of Theatre and Drama Arts at the University of Birmingham. He is author of Love me or Kill me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes (Manchester: MUP, 2002), About Kane: the Playwright and the Work (London: Faber 2009), Patrick Marber's Closer (Continuum, 2008), British Theatre Companies 1980-1994 (Methuen, 2015), Elizabethan and Jacobean Reappropriation in Contemporary British Drama: 'Upstart Crows' (Palgrave, 2017)/ His latest monograph, Harold Pinter was published by Routledge in 2023. He is co-editor of Cool Britannia: Political Theatre in the 1990s (Palgrave, 2008); Sarah Kane in Context (MUP, 2010) and Arnold Wesker: Fragments and Visions (Intellect, 2021). He is co-series editor (with Professor Maggie Gale, University of Manchester, UK) for Routledge's Modern and Contemporary Dramatists - Stage and Screen and the Palgrave Studies in Censorship (with Anne Etienne, University College, Cork, Ireland).

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Years of Lesbian and Gay Oral History (Tollington Press, 2012), *Creating Verbatim Theatre from Oral Histories* (Routledge, 2020), and *New Directions in Queer Oral History – Archives of Disruption* (Routledge 2022), which she co-edited. Verbatim plays she has written include *At the Rainbow's End* (based on interviews with older LGBT who have experienced homophobia and transphobia in care settings and in their own home), *Hearing Voices* (based on interviews with patients who met on a psychiatric ward), and *Rights of Passage* (based on interviews with LGBT asylum seekers in the UK). She is also the co-founder of the British Oral History Society's LGBT Special Interest Group and the Artistic Director of her own theatre company, Artemis. Clare she has been performing one-woman comedy theatre shows for audiences in the UK and US for over two decades.

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PREFACE

"No story comes from nowhere, new stories are born of old."[1]

Adaptation and appropriation lie at the centre of theatre's liveness as a dynamic and ever-evolving aesthetic practice. From Ancient Greek dramatists to postmodern re-imaginings, the stage has long been a space-as a source or outcome-of the repetition, recreation, re-presentation, revision, transition, rewriting, reinterpretation, re-telling, etc. process. In the 21st century, this lasting stimulus has taken on new complexities and urgencies, structured by changing cultural frameworks, technological advances, and socio-political movements that challenge the boundaries of authorship, inspiration, and authenticity.

This volume is the outcome of a successful collaboration to analyse the diverse representations of adaptation and appropriation in contemporary British theatre and performance. It scrutinizes how plays, novels, historical texts, cultural memories, and lived experiences are continuously recreated through performance, both on traditional stages and in digital spaces, community settings, site-specific environments, and cross-disciplinary contexts. The chapters in this volume reflect not only geographical and disciplinary but also methodological diversity that brings together theoretical reflections, dramaturgical case studies, performative analyses, and autoethnographic perspectives-echoing the richness and complexity of the field.

The focus of the volume has been deliberately inclusive and dialogic. Rather than confining the concept of adaptation to fixed definitions, adaptation and appropriation are considered as a fluid and multifaceted practice that invite a rethinking of authority, identity, genre, and audience engagement. Following Linda Hutcheon's understanding of adaptation as both product and process-"repetition without replication"[2]- the book is subdivided into three parts to reflect key trajectories:

[1] Rushdie, Salman. 1990. Haroun and the Sea of Stories. London: Granta/Penguin.
[2] Hutcheon, Linda. 2006. A Theory of Adaptation. NY & London: Routledge.

1. **From Page to Stage** explores the transformation of literary narratives into performative experiences, often dealing with issues of trauma, identity, and postcoloniality.
2. **From Stage to Screen** addresses how theatrical texts and practices are transformed into film, digital, and immersive formats, analysing the questions of liveness, spectatorship, etc.
3. **Theatre and Gender, Race, and Sexuality** turns a critical lens on adaptation and appropriation as tools for resistance, visibility, and cultural rearticulation in the performance of marginalised identities.

The success of this volume is indebted to the intellectual generosity, patience and support of its contributors, whose study has been instrumental in structuring the trajectory of this project. Their diverse perspectives and commitment to creating critical dialogue have significantly enriched the scope of this study. Appreciation is also due to the broader scholarly and practitioner communities who responded to the call for chapters and affirmed the relevance of this intellectual initiative. The support of the publishing team, whose confidence in the project's scope and scholarly significance made this publication possible, is likewise gratefully acknowledged.

This collection aspires to contribute substantially to the intersecting fields of adaptation studies, performance studies, and contemporary British theatre. It is envisioned as both a critical resource for new researches which will inspire further conversations and creative re-imaginings of what narratives can become when passed from one hand to another, from one stage to the next.

Uğur Ada
Editor
Türkiye 2025

FROM PAGE TO STAGE

CHAPTER ONE

ADAPTING TRAUMA IN THEATRE: A STUDY OF *WHITE TEETH* AT THE KILN THEATRE

ÖNDER ÇAKIRTAŞ

Introduction

The concept of trauma, particularly in postcolonial societies, has gained considerable prominence within contemporary studies of literature and theatre. As narratives dip into the experiences of postcolonial individuals navigating complex histories and identities, trauma studies have revealed how certain stories resonate as a kind of "cultural testimony" (Visser 2011, 274), engaging audiences in layered experiences of loss, resilience, and memory. In a similar vein, adaptation studies in theatre have grown as a rich field, examining the transformation of literature to stage and the ways it brings out new dimensions of the source material. Together, trauma and adaptation studies provide a powerful lens to analyse contemporary theatre, particularly when dealing with narratives that depict cultural dislocation, migration, and identity. This chapter will explore the Kiln Theatre's 2019 adaptation of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*, examining the adaptation's artistic choices, staging, and portrayal of trauma embedded within the characters' lives. The chapter will connect these elements with trauma studies and adaptation theories to reveal how the production captures and amplifies the novel's thematic depth.

Adaptation and trauma: A convergence in theory

Adaptation encompasses a broad array of interpretations and practices. On one level, it underscores the generative and intertextual nature of literature, celebrating its capacity to engage in dialogues across texts. On another, it grapples with issues of mimicry, navigating the fine line between homage

and plagiarism, as Julie Sanders (2019) insightfully observes. According to Sanders (2019), "Adaptation is, then, both a response to, a reinforcer of, and a potential shaper of canon and has had particular impact as a process through the multimedia and global affordances of the 20th century onwards, from novels to theatre, from poetry to music, and from film to digital content" (para. 1). This expansive view highlights adaptation's dual role as both a creative act and a critical engagement with cultural and artistic traditions, shaping and reshaping meaning across diverse mediums and contexts. Linda Hutcheon (2006), in *A Theory of Adaptation*, conceptualizes adaptation through the metaphor of the palimpsest, arguing that "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative–a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (9). This perspective emphasizes the autonomy of adaptations, viewing them as layered texts that both echo and transform their sources. In contrast, Sanders (2006) highlights the collaborative nature of adaptation, describing it as "a form of collaboration across time and sometimes across culture or language" (47). Sanders extends the scope of adaptation by examining how it is shaped not only by its original sources but also by evolving theoretical and intellectual movements. She underscores that adaptations and appropriations are influenced as much by contemporary critical discourses as by the texts they reimagine, positioning adaptation as a dynamic and dialogic process that bridges temporal, cultural, and linguistic divides (13).

Adaptations, as Rachel Carroll (2009) suggests, "address a desire to return to an 'original' textual encounter" (1). Adaptations can be likened to boomerangs, returning to the origins from which they emerged, albeit altered through the journey. Frances Babbage (2015), in her article *Adaptation and Storytelling in the Theatre*, examines the transformative nature of storytelling, arguing that every literary work participates in and intervenes within a continuous history of textual production and exchange. She asserts that "any work of literature stands as a contribution to, and intervention in, an ongoing history of textual production and transmission: its covers are not opaque but translucent, its pages already scribbled on in other hands" (2). Drawing on Roland Barthes's concepts of intertextuality and post-structuralism, Babbage emphasizes that retelling a source text–be it a folk tale or literary fiction, widely known or obscure–is an inherently "inclusive gesture" (2). This process, she contends, probes the boundaries of narratives and seeks to expand rather than constrain the communicative possibilities of the source material. Through this lens, adaptation becomes an act of dialogue and reinterpretation, broadening the horizons of textual meaning and engagement. Within this framework, theatre adaptations stand out as particularly apt expressions of this process. By transforming

narratives into live performance, theatrical adaptations become dynamic acts of communication, effectively weaving together layers of meaning and fostering a rich, interactive exchange between text, performance, and audience.

Frances Babbage (2019) insightfully observes that "[t]he history of drama is also the history of prose transformation" (1), highlighting the intrinsic link between theatrical practice and the act of adaptation. She further emphasizes that "[t]heatre is an art self-evidently bound up with adaptation in the widest sense, since repetition, re-presentation, and revision are integral to its operations and expected by its audiences" (1). This view underscores the inherent fluidity of theatre as a medium that thrives on reinvention. Babbage's notion of "the heterogeneity of adaptation practice" (3) reflects the wide spectrum of reinterpretations that theatre adaptations encompass. From reimagining narrative structures to embedding cultural, temporal, or ideological nuances, these adaptations illustrate the versatility and transformative power of theatre as a space for continual renewal and dialogue. Adaptations that move from theatre to theatre occupy a unique position, distinct from novel-to-stage or film adaptations, due to their inherently inter-theatrical dialogue. Such adaptations often foreground cultural or national perspectives, reframing the source text through the specific cultural, political, social, communal, or psychological contexts of the country or nation into which they are adapted. This process allows for a reimagining of the original work, embedding local resonances, national narratives, and socio-political concerns that reflect the unique experiences of the adapting culture. As a result, theatre-to-theatre adaptations become not only acts of reinterpretation but also vehicles for cultural negotiation and identity expression.

Joanna Tomkins (2014), in her editorial comment *Theatre and Adaptation* published in *Theatre Journal*, argues that "theatre is inherently an adaptive art form, inevitably pulling aspects of other texts and contexts into its sphere of relations" (ix) Unlike literary adaptations, which often emphasize fidelity to the source, theatre operates within the autonomy of derivation. Its very essence lies in the transformative journey from page to stage, reformulating written narratives into dynamic, embodied performances. This process underscores theatre's unique capacity to reinterpret and recontextualize stories, crafting them anew through the interplay of text, performance, and audience engagement. Similarly, in the introduction to *Contemporary Approaches to Adaptation in Theatre*, Kara Reilly (2018) highlights the inherently repetitive nature of theatre, asserting that its essence lies in acts of reiteration and reinterpretation. According to Reilly (2018), nearly all playwrights are, in essence, adaptors, drawing inspiration

from works written long before their time (xxii). Referencing postmodern American playwright Charles L. Mee, Reilly provocatively concludes that "every great poet is also a thief," (xxii) underscoring the idea that adaptation is not merely derivative but a creative act of reimagining and reshaping pre-existing material. This perspective situates adaptation as a core process in the evolution of theatre, emphasizing its dialogic relationship with the past while contributing to the ongoing reinvention of artistic expression.

However, this raises the enduring question of 'fidelity'. Whether a theatrical adaptation remains faithful to its source text becomes particularly contentious when the performative nature of theatre is considered. Given the inherently generative and transformative qualities of theatrical works, adaptation serves as a pivotal mode of representation. In this process, the original text may not only be transformed or transferred but also transcended or even fundamentally altered, giving rise to an entirely new genre or form. Theatrical adaptations, therefore, challenge traditional notions of fidelity, embracing reinterpretation and innovation as integral to their creative evolution. In this context, Robert Stam (2000)'s observations on film adaptations of novels can be equally applied to theatrical adaptations. Stam argues that adaptations should not be measured solely by their fidelity to the source material but rather appreciated as independent creative works that engage in dialogue with the original text (54-76).

> The language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as *infidelity*, *betrayal*, *deformation*, *violation*, *vulgarization*, and *desecration*, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity. *Infidelity* resonates with overtones of Victorian prudishness; *betrayal* evokes ethical perfidy; *deformation* implies aesthetic disgust; *violation* calls to mind sexual violence; *vulgarization* conjures up class degradation; and *desecration* intimates a hind of religious sacrilege toward the "sacred word" (54).

This perspective resonates strongly with theatre adaptations, where the performative medium inherently necessitates transformation. Like film, theatre adaptations reimagine narratives through distinct artistic lenses, reshaping stories to suit the demands of live performance while exploring new dimensions of meaning and expression. In theatre, however, adaptations inherently engage in textual reformulation, as Carroll (2009) emphasizes: "Adaptation of a prior cultural text–no matter how 'faithful' in intention or aesthetic–is inevitably an interpretation of that text: to this extent, every adaptation is an instance of textual *infidelity*" (italics original, 1). This infidelity is particularly pronounced in theatre adaptations, where the performative medium demands reinterpretation and transformation. Far

from being a flaw, such divergence is essential; without it, the intrinsic nature of theatre–its immediacy, dynamism, and responsiveness–would collapse, rendering the adaptation inert and disconnected from the live, evolving context of performance. However, one of the most significant aspects of fidelity in adaptation lies in the preservation of certain cultural and affective themes, such as trauma, cultural dislocation, religious identity, postcoloniality, and other deeply rooted experiences. These themes often resist transformation, as their emotional and cultural resonance must remain intact to convey the original text's core essence. While the medium and form may shift, the retention of these thematic elements ensures that the adaptation maintains a meaningful connection to its source, allowing it to address universal human concerns while also respecting the specificities of cultural and historical contexts. Yet, these themes are not immutable; they can be reinterpreted through theatrical and dramaturgical strategies that emphasize their pathos, catharsis, or revolutionary potential. Adaptations often reframe trauma, cultural dislocation, or postcoloniality in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences and address the urgencies of the present moment. By leveraging the immediacy of live performance, theatre can amplify these themes, engaging the audience through heightened emotional impact or provoking critical reflection on timely issues. This adaptive process allows for both continuity and reinvention, ensuring that enduring themes remain relevant and compelling within the evolving cultural landscape.

The intersection of trauma and adaptation in theatre reveals the intricate role of dramaturgy in translating complex emotional landscapes to the stage. For a work like *White Teeth*, which navigates multiple traumas across generations and cultures, adaptation requires thoughtful consideration of both narrative and the emotional weight within. As Patrick Duggan (2012) argues, trauma often finds its most resonant expression in tragedy, "in which performance might be able to articulate, reconsider, explore, reframe and represent the 'unrepresentable' of trauma" (1). This dynamic between trauma representation and adaptation is crucial, as it allows the theatrical production to translate the novel's layers of trauma, identity, and cultural clash into live performance. *White Teeth*, adapted by playwright Stephen Sharkey for Kiln Theatre, exemplifies this reclamation process, transforming Zadie Smith's narrative of migration, intergenerational trauma, and multiculturalism into a communal, interactive experience for the audience. Through staging, visual cues, and character dynamics, Sharkey's adaptation brings to life the novel's examination of trauma within the framework of postcolonial British society. Performance scholar Miriam Haughton (2018), in her seminal work *Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow* (2018), explores

what she evocatively describes as the "staging of suffering" (1). This framework will guide my analysis of the adaptation of *White Teeth* to the stage, focusing on how the performance conveys the novel's complex layers of trauma. Observing the interplay between actors' actions, scenographic design, and audience reactions, alongside an examination of the diegetic action, narrative, and character development, provides insight into how adaptation practices translate the novel's traumatic undertones into a performative mode.

In this context, adapting *White Teeth* to the stage aligns closely with Patrick Duggan (2012)'s concept of "trauma-tragedy." Duggan describes this as "a contemporary structure of feeling which is embodied in a performance mode that is acutely concerned with addressing the traumatic" (7). The stage adaptation's focus on *White Teeth*'s thematic preoccupations with identity, memory, and intergenerational trauma reveals its resonance with this performance mode. By embodying the novel's emotional and psychological conflicts in live performance, the adaptation not only narrates trauma but also creates an immersive, affective experience for the audience, offering a potent reflection on contemporary cultural and personal struggles.

Adapting trauma in *White Teeth* at Kiln Theatre

Intriguingly, Zadie Smith opens her debut novel, *White Teeth* (2000), with an epigraph drawn from the world of theatre. Smith opens her debut novel, *White Teeth* (2000), with Antonio's line from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "What is past is prologue" (xi). This reference to *The Tempest*, a play deeply concerned with the movement from bondage to liberation, serves as a nuanced allusion to the intricate processes of self-realization and emancipation within Smith's multifaceted, often haunted characters. By invoking Shakespeare's meditation on legacy and destiny, Smith foregrounds the lingering shadows of history that continue to shape the lives of her protagonists. Smith further contextualizes her narrative by referencing E.M. Forster, an author whose works dissect the far-reaching impacts of colonialism and imperialism on individual and cultural identities (xi). This intertextual framing enriches *White Teeth* by aligning it with broader postcolonial themes, situating her characters in a space where personal history is inextricably intertwined with collective trauma. The thematic resonance of *The Tempest*–particularly the tension between historical inheritance and present identity–echoes the experiences of postcolonial subjects, for whom the past indeed serves as the prologue to ongoing negotiations of identity and belonging.

Celebrated as "the new Salman Rushdie," (Moss 2000) Smith crafts a world steeped in multiculturalism, post-imperialism, and an aspirational notion of post-racial society, though the latter remains an elusive ideal rather than a fully realized reality. Through her vivid storytelling, Smith reflects on the complexities and contradictions of these themes, engaging with the tensions between heritage and modernity while questioning whether true post-racism can ever be more than a utopian vision. The original story of *White Teeth* is a sprawling narrative that spans a century, intricately weaving together the family histories of two diverse lineages. On one side are the Irish-Jamaican roots of Kilburn-born Irie Jones; on the other, the British-Bengali twin brothers, Millat and Magid Iqbal. The two families are connected through a profound friendship between their fathers, forged during World War II. Their ancestors stretch back through the far-reaching branches of the British Empire, encompassing Victorian plantation owners and Indian mutineers, illustrating the vast historical and cultural interplay that shapes their present lives. Smith's novel celebrates the unpredictable and chaotic nature of the gene pool, juxtaposing it against the rigid, calculated control represented by genetic engineering–a significant concern at the time of its publication. The narrative portrays history and empire as colossal cultural colliders, bringing people together in unexpected ways, blending ethnicities, and challenging traditional customs. Through this lens, *White Teeth* becomes a vibrant exploration of identity, hybridity, and the forces that drive cultural evolution.

The 2019 adaptation of *White Teeth* at the Kiln Theatre in London, directed by Indhu Rubasingham, brought a refreshing yet poignant theatrical interpretation of Smith's novel. It showcased a bold, playful aesthetic while exploring the heavier themes of trauma and cultural identity. The production's choice to infuse music, humour, and a strong ensemble cast effectively translated the novel's fragmented narrative structure into a visually cohesive and emotionally compelling performance. Rubasingham's direction emphasized the clash of cultures and the inherited pain carried by each character, enabling the audience to feel the generational weight of trauma as it unfolded on stage. The adaptation featured a cast of 14 characters, with the narrative unfolding partly through the coma-induced perspective of Rosie Jones, a dentist probing her mixed-race family's history. Central to her exploration is the story of her mother, Irie, who remains uncertain which of the twin sons from the Bangladeshi Muslim Iqbal family fathered her child. Alongside the interconnected fates of the Jones and Iqbal families, Sharkey amplifies the role of Mad Mary, a minor character in the novel. Reimagined as a choric figure, Mad Mary embodies the play's central theme, encapsulating the "multiculti muddle" (Billington

2018) of contemporary Britain, a term borrowed from Michael Billington. As Billington (2018) further observes, the adaptation's vibrant energy is tempered by its rapid temporal shifts, creating a "theatrical kaleidoscope" where scenes seldom linger.

The adaptation of *White Teeth* reconfigures the novel's narrative focus and compresses its expansive scope, necessitated by the transition from a sprawling 500-page text to the confines of theatrical performance (Wolf 2018). This shift emphasizes themes of identity and intergenerational trauma, framing them within a distinctly theatrical lens. The play departs from the novel's original starting point with Archie Jones, an Englishman grappling with despair, and instead foregrounds Mad Mary, a marginal figure in the novel. Reimagined as a choric presence, Mary becomes both narrator and guide, steering the audience through a fragmented yet emotionally resonant exploration of familial and cultural legacies. Mary's impulsive act of injecting Rosie Jones with a syringe triggers the narrative's temporal regression–a dramaturgical device that seeks to evoke the recursive nature of trauma, where the past perpetually intrudes upon the present. However, this structural choice introduces disorientation. This temporal instability mirrors the fragmented nature of traumatic memory, yet also underscores the challenges of adapting such complexity for the stage. While the novel's sprawling narrative offers space for nuanced exploration, the play's compressed format risks sacrificing coherence for emotional immediacy. Rosie, a character absent from the novel, takes centre stage in the adaptation, supplanting the narrative prominence of her mother, Irie. This shift reorients the story around Rosie's pursuit of self-knowledge, rooted in the uncertainty of her paternal lineage. Her father might be either Magid, the intellectual and Anglicized twin, or Millat, his radicalized counterpart. This ambiguity embodies the cultural and personal dislocation that trauma often engenders. The play reframes the novel's intricate interplay of ethnic, religious, and national identities into a reverse-chronological structure, seeking to expose how the past shapes the present. Rosie's journey culminates in a moment of self-reconciliation, an attempt to transform inherited trauma into agency and understanding. Samad Iqbal, the Bangladeshi father of the twins, articulates the adaptation's central theme when he reflects on London's ability to indelibly mark its inhabitants. His observation speaks to the interplay between place, identity, and the cumulative weight of lived experiences. This sentiment is reinforced by Mad Mary's poignant closing remarks, invoking the Kilburn neighbourhood with a lyrical homage to its air and vitality. While the adaptation captures flashes of the novel's thematic depth, its struggle to balance narrative coherence with theatrical immediacy highlights the inherent difficulty of

transposing the layered exploration of trauma from page to stage. The result is a performance that evokes moments of connection but occasionally falters in fully embodying the novel's emotional and narrative complexity.

The adaptation emphasized contemporary resonances, such as the fraught yet loving relationship between Archie's half-Jamaican daughter, Irie, and Rosie, the child Irie is expecting as the novel concludes. The reimagined setting situated Rosie as a 25-year-old woman in the present, thus altering the temporal framework of the narrative. Similarly, Sid Sagar and Assad Zaman delivered powerful performances as the twins Magid and Millat Iqbal, whose divergent paths–one rejecting Islam for rationalism and the other embracing militant religiosity–capture the tensions of cultural and ideological identities in the modern era. These changes underscore the adaptive process as both a preservation of key themes and a dynamic recontextualization of the narrative to engage with contemporary audiences. One notable aspect of this adaptation was its focus on character relationships and their associated traumas. By giving each character room to voice their struggles and internal conflicts, the production underscored the importance of memory and storytelling in managing and coping with trauma. Jane Barnette (2018), in *Adapturgy: The Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation*, notes that theatrical adaptations benefit from the dramaturg's role in translating themes from the page to the stage (61), and this was certainly evident in Kiln Theatre's *White Teeth*. Characters like Archie, Samad, and Irie portrayed varying degrees of displacement and intergenerational trauma that resonate with audiences navigating postcolonial identities today. The depiction of trauma as a 'narrative' element in the novel, conveyed through the characters and its subsequent 'minorization', underscores the somatic, corporeal, and empathic potency of the theatrical medium. The 'narrative trauma' experienced by Smith's characters evolves into a 'theatrical trauma', assuming a more immediate and authentic form. In this transformation, trauma is, in effect, relived.

The adaptation took an innovative approach to representing trauma through staging techniques. For instance, reflective set pieces and fragmented lighting served as metaphors for fractured identities. As Suzanne Little (2015) emphasizes, trauma often manifests in physical and repetitive acts within performance (44-45). In *White Teeth*, recurring visual and aural motifs–like the sound of footsteps or repeated phrases–were used to depict the lingering impacts of trauma on the characters' psyches. One of the most compelling elements of *White Teeth*'s adaptation lies in its nuanced portrayal of collective trauma within a postcolonial framework. Matthew S. Buckley (2009)'s exploration of refugee theatre in *Refugee Theatre: Melodrama and Modernity's Loss* sheds light on how theatre can embody