LITERARY ANALYSIS OF ‘WHITE TEETH’ BY ZADIE SMITH AND ‘HONOUR’ BY ELIF SHAFAK FROM THE STANDPOINT OF PLAGIARISM

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ABSTRACT

Elif Shafak is an award-winning prominent novelist who was born in Strasbourg, France, in 1971. Being one of the most widely read women writers in Turkey, she writes her novels in both Turkish and English. She has written nine novels most of which became best-sellers. Her books have been translated into more than forty languages. Her novel Honour (Iskender) which was published in the summer of 2011 was accused of plagiarism for its resemblance to Zadie Smith’s White Teeth. Through a close reading, one can observe that though there are some similarities in terms of the theme and the characters between Shafak’s Honour and Smith’s White Teeth, on the contrary there are also differences as well in terms of the basic elements of the novel. It is usual that the novels dealing with the same themes will most likely have some similar characters entangled with similar problems. Considering what the term plagiarism denotes, this article aims to highlight the resemblences and differences between the two novels through a close reading of both. Thus, the two novels are going to be compared in terms of such literary elements as setting, plot, characters, themes, and point of view.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

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of such literary elements as \textit{setting}, \textit{plot}, \textit{characters}, \textit{themes}, and \textit{point of view}. Through a close reading, one can observe that though there are some similarities between Şafak’s \textit{Honour} and Smith’s \textit{White Teeth}, on the contrary there are also differences as well in terms of the basic elements of the novel. It is usual that the novels dealing with the same themes will most likely have some similar characters entangled with similar problems. In other words, it means that despite the thematic similarity and the spatio-temporal multiplicity in both novels the two authors have picked up various distinct stories to weave their plots in different tones and narrations applied to the characters that face common issues of late 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Compared in terms of ‘point of view’ the two novels are completely different in the way that Şafak uses first person point of view with a solemn approach to the incidents, whereas Smith uses third person omniscient with a sarcastic and comic approach.

In terms of the settings in both novel, it is likely to underline that the multiplicity of the settings is a commonality in both novels. They both use more than one generation and they go beyond the political borders of the countries. The physical setting where the plots mostly take place is the multicultural metropolitan city of London in late 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, they differ in that while Şafak moves the story from a 1950s’ Kurdish village to Istanbul then to London and stretches it even to Abu Dhabi, Smith’s novel has a background of British Jamaica, a WW2 Bulgarian village and Bangladesh before ending up in today’s London.

As for the characters in both novels, there are similarities and differences. Şafak’s Iskender and Smith’s Millat are spotlighted for their similarities. They both are the young, charismatic and handsome hanging out with English girls. They both are ‘protest’ characters. Şafak’s Esma and Smith’s both are in search of identity, and vaguely they lack the sense of belonging. They are the in-betweeners of the novel. Nevertheless, in general the Şafak’s characters are mostly dynamic who develop themselves through change in mood and mind, whereas \textit{White Teeth} consists of static figures. The characters except Millat (to a certain degree) remain almost the same through out the novel.

When it comes to the plot, the order and sequence or knitting are completely different. In Şafak’s \textit{Honour}, the novel starts from the end with the technique of metafiction through Esma’s words, who is the narrator. Although the main narrator seems to be Esma, one of the major and static character of the novel, the other characters also tell the story from their points of view. The events have not been sequenced in a linear timeline. They are intertwined. The events in the story does not follow rising action, contrary to the usual order of the elements that construct a plot (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution), the novel starts with the resolution. The novel starts with Iskender’s being released from the prison, the last section of the novel. Overall, the novel is narrated through such techniques as flashback, flashforward, skips and summations. The action that rises up to the climax starts with Pembe’s seeing a man named Elias and reaches the climax when Jamila is murdered instead of Pembe. The tension of Iskender’s internal conflicts...
In Zadie Smith’s White Teeth, the plot starts with Archie’s commitment to a suicide because his wife Ophelia has divorced him, and later develops around the members of three families, Jones, Ikbal, and Chalfen. It goes on in a regular form of an ordinary novel that follows exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The storyteller is a neutral unknown third person who has a supercilious and omniscient approach. Unlike the serious and neutral narrator in Honour, White Teeth’s narrator seems more witty and cynical. The topics of the plot might sound similar, but when approached holistically, each scene has its own distinct story. Although the issues the characters face and the processes they go through might seem a bit similar, the way the two plots are woven and the stories behind them are very different.

Compared in terms of the theme, both novels handle such common themes as emigration, identity crisis, mysticism, religious fundamentalism, ethnicity, multiculturalism etc. Nevertheless, they differ in the way that while Shafak is emphasizing the violence against women, Zadie Smith puts more stress on legacy ethnicity and one’s roots. Shafak uses metaphor of black and white colours while explaining how honour is attributed to masculinity and disgrace to femininity, as for smith, she uses the white teeth metaphor to symbolize the roots and unity of human being.

As a final say, considering what the term plagiarism denotes when it comes to the novels and the above results, one can clearly conclude that it would be unfair to claim that Elif Shafak has plagiarized Zadie Smith’s White Teeth.

Keywords: plagiarism, close reading, Shafak, Smith, White Teeth, Honour

ZADIE SMITH’IN BEYAZ DİŞLER VE ELİF ŞAFAK’IN İSKENDER ADLI ROMANLARININ İNTİHAL AÇISINDAN İNCELEMESİ

ÖZET

nedenlerle, bu makale close reading (yapısalı okuma) tekniği ile, intihal (plagiarism) teriminin akademik makaleler dışındaki edebi eserler için ne ifade ettiği de göz önune alarak, her iki roman arasındaki farklılık ve benzerlikleri ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Yani bir başka deyişle her iki roman, zaman-mekan, konu, karakter, tema, ve bakış açısı gibi romanın yapı taşıları olarak varsayılan edebi öğeler açısından detaylı bir okumayla karşılaştırılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: intihal, close reading, Şafak, Smith, Beyaz Dişler, İskender

Introduction

Elif Shafak, as highlighted in her official site, is the most-read female author in Turkey. She is a Turkish novelist who was born in Strasbourg, France; and currently lives in London. She writes her novels in both English and Turkish. Being a member of some significant institutions and having taught at various universities in Turkey, USA and UK, she is also known for her novels The Bastard of Istanbul and The Forty Rules of Love. She has studied on International Relations, has a masters degree in Gender and Women’s Studies and a PhD in Political Science. She is generally known as an advocate of women and minority rights. Her writings generally portray the cross-sections from Istanbul, tenet of Sufism1 and Ottoman culture. In the year of 2011, Lydia Kiesling, the editor and reviewer of The Millions, wrote about the allegation of a translator who translated Zadie Smith’s White Teeth into Turkish, which accused Elif Shafak to have plagiarized Smith’s White Teeth while writing Honour. In her coverage of ‘Honour’ and ‘White Teeth’, titled as ‘Dispatch from Turkey: Plagiarism Charges Levied at Award-Winning Author’ on an online magazine called The Millions, Kiesling gives further news chronologically related to the blood-and-guts-arguments over the allegations and rejections of plagiarism. In additions to the parties claiming that there is Plagiarism, Kiesling includes Shafak’s response as well as the support of third parties’ for Shafak. The most striking support comes from Zadie Smith herself as Shafak claims after having received a support letter from Smith in which she defines the claims as ‘ridiculous’. In her letter, Smith has suggested Shafak not to go down to the level of the people who claim her book is plagiarised, and she also describes claimants as ‘poisonous’ According to Shafak’s interview titled ‘Support Letter to Elif Shafak’ (Elif Şafak’a Destek Mektubu) with a Turkish news agency. Upon all those arguments, after defining the term plagiarism in details, this article aims to underline the differences and resemblances between Shafak’s Honour and Smith’s White Teeth through a close reading. It will compare the two novels in terms of the five basic elements of novel: point of view, setting, character, plot, and theme; all of which construct the structure of a novel.

Merriam Webster defines the word plagiarism as “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own: use (another’s production) without crediting the source” and “to commit literary theft: present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source”. (Plagiarism. Merriam-Webster, 2016). Dictionary.com makes the definition as “an act or instance of using or closely imitating the language and thoughts of another author without authorization and the

1 “Sufism is a term that designates Islam’s mystical and ascetic movements. A Sufi is one who practices Sufism. Sufis attempt to go beyond the restrictions of a “typical” moslem life and to seek Allah in more intimate ways. They strive to break down the barriers between themselves and Allah by replacing their human characteristics with divine ones. In many ways, this is similar to the Buddhist’s attempts to reach enlightenment (the realization that all is one). Since Allah is one himself, the attempt to reach him can become the realization of the oneness of all things. […]There has always been a tension between Sufism and classical Islam because many of the beliefs, actions, and statement of Sufism appear heretical to non-Sufis”. (Flesher, 1996).

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representation of that author's work as one's own, as by not crediting the original author” (plagiarism. Dictionary.com Unabridged. 2016). The word is said to have been derived from Latin plagiarus, which means “kidnapper, seducer, plunderer, one who kidnaps the child or slave of another.” (Barnhart, R.K., 1988, p. 1284)

Although most of the dictionaries define the word in line with the context of above definitions, it is not easy to draw a concrete line regarding to what extent a piece of work can be deemed as having been plagiarized or not. Additionally, plagiarism is often used interchangeably with copyright violation. Haviland and Mullin, in this regard, highlights that “plagiarism is a question of attribution (who claims to have written what), and copyright is a question of who has permission to use what text (or other copyrightable material) for what purposes” (Haviland & Mullin 2009, p. 131). Furthermore, they claim, “it is possible to plagiarize a piece without violating copyright. For example, even if a person has the writer's permission to pass along a piece of writing as his or her own, this can constitute plagiarism, even though it does not violate copyright” (Haviland & Mullin 2009, p. 131). Moreover, they go on; “a writer can violate copyright, even though leaving the author or artist’s name on a piece and acknowledging its source, if the owner of the copyright does not give permission for its use” (Haviland & Mullin 2009, p. 131). From Haviland’s explanations, it is not so vague and complicated to comprehend the distinction between plagiarism and copyright infringement. Nevertheless, when it comes to fiction which is considered to have some certain elements such as character, plot, setting, theme, point of view, the definition of the term plagiarism becomes blurred and it lacks its precision that it expresses for the academic works and fields. Due to the fact that the number of the themes, settings and other basic elements of the fiction is not limitless, there will eventually be some coincidence in terms of the content of those elements.

As known, close reading is a way of analyzing a literary work through the stylistic details embedded in the structure of the novel. In such a reading, as New Critics and Formalists assume, the critic will be able to abstain from falling into ‘intentional fallacy’ or ‘affective fallacy’. In this regard, Wolfreys et al. underline that “close reading is implicitly assumed to be an act of reading divorced from any matters supposedly extraneous to the text, such as context, matters of history, questions of politics, issues of gender and race, and so on.” (Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack. 2006, P.21). Likewise, David Mikics, the author of A New Handbook of Literary Terms, asserts, “Close reading is the necessary form of serious literary study. Any reader who wishes to avoid turning a poem or [a] novel into a mere piece of evidence concerning society, history, or intellectual tradition, and instead wants to grasp the work’s argument in its own terms, must read closely (Mikics, 2007, P.61).

As mentioned above, the aim of this article is to lay down the resemblances and differences between the two novels through a comparison in terms of the basic elements of the novel, which can be sequenced as point of view, setting, character, plot, and theme.

**Point of View**

Compared in terms of point of view, Zadie Smith’s debut novel ‘White Teeth’ is told by the omniscient narrator with the third person point of view all throughout the novel. Being the god-like narrator, the author knows well enough about every single character despite a great many shifts in settings as it can be seen in one of the lines at the beginning of the novel where Archie, around whom the plot develops though not in a chronological order, attempts to commit suicide. As for Shafak’s Honour, a first person point of view seems to have dominated the narration for the greater part of the novel. However, the narrator is neutral and it is one of the characters in the novel, Esma, who has us read her own words especially in the first chapter with the first person point of view “I don’t think I’ll ever become a real writer and that’s quite all right now. I’ve reached an age at which I’m more
...at peace with my limitations and failures’’ as well as in the epilogue; ‘‘It was only when her letters ceased to come that I understood she had died for the second and the last time.’’ (Shafak, 2011. 342).

Setting

Setting is the time and place in which the events in a literary work occur. There may be more than one setting in a story. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical and social environments, cultural attitudes, and the historical time in which the action takes place. Compared in terms of setting, both of the authors use multiple settings in their works. In Smith’s White Teeth we find ourselves in various settings ranging - though not chronologically - from a church in colonial Jamaica to a tank in a Bulgarian village bordering Greece and Turkey in WW2, to Bangladesh, India, even the multiracial district of Willesden, London, from the 1970s to 1990s. Willesden is the epicenter of the settings throughout the novel as Smith puts forward a clear picture of the diverse structure of the town and period in which most of the plot takes place “This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment.” (Smith, 2001. 334). Shafak also uses numerous settings as the story is read through a narration full of flashbacks and foreshadowings. London of 1970s being the focal setting of Shafak’s work, she takes us from a village by Euphrates, Mala Çar Bayan (House of Four Winds), from the 1950s and ‘60s, to Istanbul. The plot develops around Pembe and Iskender (mother and son) after the family’s migration from Istanbul to London in the 1970s. However, the setting later stretches out to Abu Dhabi as the father, Adem Toprak drifts away and goes after the woman with whom he falls in love. And finally to a prison in Shrewsbury where Iskender, in the ‘80s and early ‘90s, complains through his writing about having migrated to London, which he think is what has caused his family to fall apart: “We Topraks were only passers-by in this city – a half-Turkish, half-Kurdish family in the wrong end of London” (Shafak, 2011. 50).

Characters

Characters can be said to be the folk in a novel. Every novels less or more has characters such as main characters, supporting characters, walk-on characters, and minor characters. Character is the quality that makes an individual differ from the others. We can classify the characters in a novel as round, flat, and anthropomorphic, which can also be defined as dynamic or static characters. For example, dynamic ones are the rounded ones who change in the course of the novel, whereas the static (flat) ones do not change. Compared in terms of Characters, both authors uses a variety of major and minor characters. The characters spotlighted in ‘Honour’ are consisted of eleven characters. The most notable ones are Iskender, Cemile, Pembe, Adem, Esma, Yunus, Roxana, Elias, Zişan, Tarık, Berzo, and Naze. As for Zadie Smith’s White Teeth, Samad Iqbal, Irie, Archie Jones and Millat come to the stage as the major dynamic characters. Comparing Honour’s protagonist Iskender and White Teeth’s Millat, we see that both of them are the second generation of migrant families searching for the sense of belonging to a culture far different from theirs. Being one of the dynamic characters, Iskender reminds us of Millat as they both are stormsing the plot and have similar experiences like hanging out with English girls, leading the ‘gangs’ they are in, and Iskender’s meeting the orator and Millat’s meeting Hifan before joining the radical groups. In addition to these similarities, both are also depicted as charismatic and handsome, and they both have foreign accents as Iskender is from Turkey but grows up in London and Millat grows up with his Bangladeshi family.

It is most likely to see similar crises when it comes to migrants’ issues as both authors render the identity problem very important in their works. Shafak’s Esma seems to have similar conflicts to Smith’s Irie as they both are depicted as the in-betweeners; they both are in quest for their identity. Esma’s having the feeling of not belonging ‘here or there,’ and Irie’s wondering what her roots are through the teeth metaphor can be said to be another resemblance. Esma and Irie are both obsessed...
with their physical appearance as Esma locks herself in the bathroom and checks on her body for long periods while Irie tries to look more western by changing her hair. Esma’s protest but somehow reconciliatory personality as a female reacting to Adem’s being flattered by her mother all the time, and her marrying and living a stable life, which helps her remain as a static character show that Irie and Esma are the only ones that end up with normal lives with their new families.

Smith’s Joshua’s getting involved with FATE (anti animal exploitation group) and Yunus’s meeting with the anti-capitalists anarchist group is another resemblance between the characters of the two authors. As for the fathers in the novels, they have some similarities too. In Shafak’s Honour, the father Adem Toprak is an unhappy character with his wife and lives an illegitimate relation with Roxana, leaving his wife and children behind. Samad, the father character in White Teeth, also is unhappy with his wife Alsana Begum and starts to have an illegitimate love affair with Poppy Burts. It is very likely to say that, in terms of the character analysis, the most notable difference between the two novels is that: The characters in Honour are lively ones who develop themselves in the process of the narration, whereas White Teeth’s characters are mostly static ones who remain the same throughout the novel.

Plot

Comparing the two novels in terms of their plot, one can see that there are some obvious differences regarding the order and sequence of the events. In Shafak’s Honour, the novel starts from the end with the technique of metafiction through Esma’s words, who is the narrator. Although the main narrator seems to be Esma, one of the major and static character of the novel, the other characters also tell the story from their points of view. The events have not been sequenced in a linear timeline. They are intertwined. The novel starts with Iskender’s being released from the prison, the last section of the novel. Overall, the novel is narrated through such techniques as flashback, flashforward, skips and summations. Oriental and occidental traditions, male patriarchal hegemony, loss of sense of belonging stemmed from immigration, problems of minorities, cultural clashes are some highlighted subjects of the narration in the Honour. The action that rises up to the climax is when Pembe starts to see a man named Elias, who is not welcomed by either Adem’s brother, Tarik or his nephew, Iskender. Tarik talks to Iskender about taking care of Pembe’s affair. Trying to decide whether to talk with her and warn her first or to just do what she deserves, Iskender decides to kill his mother against all odds as he is ‘the eye of his mother’ - his mother’s ‘sultan.’ In the meantime, Pembe’s twin sister, Jamila is on a visit to her sister in London after so many years. At this point the climax is reached when Jamila is murdered instead of Pembe as Iskender accidentally stabs his aunt Jamila since she resembles his mother. Iskender doesn’t realize that he has killed his aunt instead of his mother, nor does anybody else except Esma and Yunus, until a time close to his release as the incident is reported such in the papers. Several months after Jamila is killed, Pembe runs away back to her village, promising Yunus and Esma to come back. People there think she is Jamila. While Iskender is in the prison, he meets Zeeshan who helps him become ‘purified’ as Iskender regrets what he has done. The tension of Iskender’s internal conflicts seems to be resolved as seen through his letter to his mother whom he believes to be alive. “To you, my sister, my brother, my poor aunt. I cannot change the past not a single moment of it. Zeeshan says I can improve myself. Even of that I am not sure. But if you’d accept me into your life again, if you could find it in your life to forgive me, what a blessing it’d be to once more be your son”.(Shafak, 2011. 323)

White teeth is comprised of the stories of English, Bangladeshi, Jamaican and Jewish people living in Willesden, London. The plot starts with Archie’s commitment to a suicide because his wife Ophelia has divorced him, and later develops around the members of three families, Jones, Ikbal, and Chalfen. The major Characters are Archibald Jones his wife Clara Bowden and his daughter Irie, Samad Ikbal his wife Alsana and their twins Magid and Millat. Marcus Chalfen, his wife Joyce and
his son Joshua. In Zadie Smith’s White Teeth, the storyteller is a neutral unknown third person. While reading the novel one can easily understand that the narrator has a feminine, supercilious and omniscient approach, being sure that it is not so easy to build any reconciliations between people coming from different cultures and races. Sense of belonging, identity problems, displacement, immigration, assimilation, hatred stemmed from being insulted, cultural integration can be listed as some highlighted issues that Smith brings forth in her novel. Unlike the static narrator in Honour, the omniscient narrator in White Teeth has a supercilious manner with the other characters. One has the feeling that as if sometimes the narrator does not want to be close to the other characters. She seems to be of the opinion that if you cannot control the things, play and joke at them. Unlike the serious and neutral narrator in Honour, White Teeth’s narrator seems more witty and cynical.

Themes

In terms of the themes that the two novels deal with, there are some resemblances and differences. The common themes are the identity crisis, mysticism, fundamentalism, ethnicity, multiculturalism, etc.; all of which might be stemming from the problems of emigrants. Shafak touches on a little bit of almost everything that can count as a problem stemming from the encounter of ‘the traditional’ and ‘the modern’ in addition to particularly taking a stand for women who are killed or exposed to violence for ‘various reasons’ around the world and in particular for ‘honour issues’ in Turkey. The violence against woman being at the center, Shafak gives an illustration of a bunch of such postmodern problems as the orient-occident conflicts on cultural and social basis via the different mindset of Iskender and his girlfriend Katie. Identity crisis as Esma’s unfulfilled search of identity; mysticism as Pembe and Jamila feel the same pain when either of them is in trouble as well as alienation, problems of migrants, love etc. It is also worthy to note that, Shafak, through the plurality of women characters in her novel, is fundamentally reactionary to the patriarchy.

Similarly, Smith takes on common themes with a completely different tone compared to Shafak’s when it comes to woman, Smith refers to the women driven mad by society by giving the example of Archi’s wife, Ophelia and Mad Mary who ‘scares’ Poopy and Samad. Fundamentalism is just another common theme of both novels; while we can see patriarchal and religious fundamentalism through ‘man’ images in Shafak’s work, ‘White Teeth’ also has a bunch of examples of religious and ideological bigotry as well. Joining the radical groups through the Orator and Hifan, both main characters in both novels, Iskender and Millat go overboard; one kills his aunt and the other attempts to kill the Nazi Doctor. There is also conservatism that could count as an important theme in Smith’s novel, which is the conservatism of religion and roots especially. With the multiplicity of the races migrating to England, Smith presents a great picture of the ethnically diverse, multicultural aura of London through the inter and intra-relations of the communities living in Willesden, London. The most important theme of ‘White Teeth’ is identity in the sense of roots, legacy and ethnicity. Samad’s talking about his grandfather Mangal Pande shows his longing for his roots before Bangladesh became a colony and he expect his children to carry the traits of his ancestors’ roots, inherit their heroic, cultural and religious legacy but not get assimilated. Irie is presented to the reader to be focused on in terms of ethnicity and hybridity, Irie’s urge to search for her ethnical background is triggered when she finds out about her mother false teeth. Finally Through Irie’s biologically multi-ethnic identity as well as Willesden’s multi-racial society, we can see Smith’s strong emphasis on hybridity, which is supported by the following quote

“Here, hybridity can be a chimera produced in a lab but also racial or cultural mixing. In that sense, it is possible to say that London is, due its multicultural or multiethnic condition, a sort of capital of hybridism. Different ingredients are combined in the same pot and the result can be both fun and tragic, as Zadie Smith shows. The author’s attitude towards her characters and plotline is also a hybrid one” (Soares, 2009).
The narration in 'Honour' and 'White Teeth' is strengthened by symbolism. The most striking example of symbolism in Shafak's novel is the comparison of the colours black and white to represent man and woman; masculinity and femininity; 'honour' and 'disgrace.' Shafak who is very critical of the patriarchy succeeds to depict the atmosphere of society through the dignity and disgrace dualism. In contrast to the general idea as to what the colours white and black symbolize, she uses the colours in a very different context and even reverses their places. The colour white, which generally means purity and innocence, when it comes to woman, functions as the indication of vulnerability to stigmatization, dirt and anything that could make a woman feel under pressure. As for black, it symbolizes the lucky-born man who could get away with ‘honour’ issues very easily and not get judged by the society thanks to his anatomical ‘superiority’ over woman. However, black would generally be expected to simply symbolize horror, evil, sorrow etc.

"It was all because women were made of the lightest cambric, Naze continued, whereas men were cut of thick, dark fabric. That is how God had tailored the two: one superior to the other. As to why He had done that, it wasn’t up to human beings to question. What mattered was that the colour black didn’t show stains, unlike the colour white, which revealed even the tiniest speck of dirt. By the same token, women who were sullied would be instantly noticed and separated from the rest, like husks removed from grains. Hence when a virgin gave herself to a man – even if he were the man whom she loved – she had everything to lose, while he had absolutely nothing to lose’’ (Shafak, 2011. 16)

In Smith’s novel, the symbolism that dominates the narration is the tooth metaphor as that is used even in the title of the book. The white teeth represent two basic elements in Smith’s work: heritage and unity. The author tries to show us the strong relationship between the tooth and heritage through Clara and Irie. After losing her teeth in a motorbike crash with Ryan Tops, Clara meets Archie and shortly after leaves her religious identity and enters the middle class English society. “She gave him a wide grin that revealed possibly her one imperfection. A complete lack of teeth in the top of her mouth” (Smith, 2001. 27). However, Clara’s daughter, Irie makes an effort to understand her roots when she realizes that her mother has false teeth. She goes to her grandmother and questions her mother’s past. She ends up marrying Joshua and living with him in Jamaica where her roots come from. The latter element that white teeth stands for is unity, which means multiculturality of the setting Smith applies. The families living in Willesden, London; the Chalfens, Jones, Iqbals and all the other characters from different racial backgrounds have at least one thing in common which is the white teeth.

Although the two authors point to mostly common issues and themes, except for Shafak’s emphasis on patriarchal dominance and Smith’s stress on one’s roots, they both take up different tones towards what is happening during the novel. Smith’s novel is mostly narrated in a cheerful and comedic tone even in the most miserable scenes. The novel starts with a depressing attitude when Archibald Jones tries to kill himself by poisoning himself in his car at the street where Mo Ishmael’s butcher shop is. Archie gets the Hoover vacuum from his house to use its tube for inhaling the exhaust fume of his car. The way the author pictures that scene sounds so serious that the reader gets sad for a probable death in the beginning of the novel “He was resigned to it. He was prepared for it. He had flipped a coin and stood staunchly by its conclusions. This was a decided-upon suicide. In fact it was a New Year’s resolution” (Smith, 2001. 6). However, as mentioned above, the author has been able to shift in tone and make an issue like committing suicide sound funny and sarcastic when Mo Ishmael does not allow Archie to gas himself on his street, which saves Archie’s life. “Do you hear that, mister? We are not licensed for suicides around here. This place halal Kosher, understand? If you’re going to die round here’, my friend, I’m afraid you’ve got to be thoroughly bled first” (Smith, 2001. 10).
On the contrary, Shafak keeps her gloomy tone in parallel with her serious subject matter. Uncle Tariq’s telling Iskender about his mother’s unaccepted love affair raises the tension in the tone and renders it abundantly serious: “‘My son,’ Tariq said. ‘I have some bad news for you.’ ‘Yeah, I figured.’ Tariq drew unsteadily on his cigarette, smoke curling in and out his nostrils, and said, in the quietest voice, ‘It’s about your mother’” (Shafak, 2011, 237). Iskender’s killing Jamila (supposedly Pembe) raises a grudge against Iskender in Esma’s tone “There have been many times when I thought of killing him. I have made elaborate plans that involved guns, poison or, better yet, a flick knife – a poetic justice, of sorts” (Shafak, 2011. 10). After his release, Iskender’s finding out about his mother’s death shows the other examples of sad and depressive tone Shafak applies all throughout the novel: “Iskender drops his head, studying his wrists as if there are still handcuffs around them. He turns to the window and sighs, his breath fogging the glass. He rolls down the window and pops his head out, breathing hard” (Shafak, 2011. 334).

Conclusion

Through a close reading, one can observe that though there are some similarities between Shafak’s Honour and Smith’s White Teeth, on the contrary there are also differences as well in terms of the basic elements of the novel. It is usual that the novels dealing with the same themes will most likely have some similar characters entangled with similar problems. In other words, it means that despite the thematic similarity and the spatio-temporal multiplicity in both novels the two authors have picked up various distinct stories to weave their plots in different tones and narrations applied to the characters that face common issues of late 20th century.

Compared in terms of ‘point of view’ the two novels are completely different in the way that Shafak uses first person point of view with a solemn approach to the incidents, whereas Smith uses third person omniscient with a sarcastic and comic approach.

In terms of the settings in both novel, it is likely to underline that the multiplicity of the settings is a commonality in both novels. They both use more than one generation and they go beyond the political borders of the countries. The physical setting where the plots mostly take place is the multicultural metropolitan city of London in late 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, they differ in that while Şafak moves the story from a 1950s’ Kurdish village to Istanbul then to London and stretches it even to Abu Dhabi, Smith’s novel has a background of British Jamaica, a WW2 Bulgarian village and Bangladesh before ending up in today’s London.

As for the characters in both novels, there are similarities and differences. Şafak’s Iskender and Smith’s Millat are spotlighted for their similarities. They both are the young, charismatic and handsome hanging out with English girls. They both are ‘protest’ characters. Şafak’s Esma and Smith’s both are in search of identity, and vaguely they lack the sense of belonging. They are the in-betweeners of the novel. Nevertheless, in general the Şafak’s characters are mostly dynamic who develop themselves through change in mood and mind, whereas White Teeth consists of static figures. The characters except Millat (to a certain degree) remain almost the same through out the novel.

When it comes to the plot, the order and sequence or knitting are completely different. In Şafak’s Honour, the novel starts from the end with the technique of metafiction through Esma’s words, who is the narrator. Although the main narrator seems to be Esma, one of the major and static character of the novel, the other characters also tell the story from their points of view. The events have not been sequenced in a linear timeline. They are intertwined. The events in the story does not follow rising action, contrary to the usual order of the elements that construct a plot (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution), the novel starts with the resolution. The novel starts with Iskender’s being released from the prison, the last section of the novel. Overall, the novel is
narrated through such techniques as flashback, flashforward, skips and summations. The action that rises up to the climax starts with Pembe’s seeing a man named Elias and reaches the climax when Jamila is murdered instead of Pembe. The tension of Iskender’s internal conflicts seems to be resolved as seen through his letter to his mother whom he believes to be alive.

In Zadie Smith’s White Teeth, the plot starts with Archie’s commitment to a suicide because his wife Ophelia has divorced him, and later develops around the members of three families, Jones, Ikbal, and Chalfen. It goes on in a regular form of an ordinary novel that follows exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The storyteller is a neutral unknown third person who has a supercilious and omniscient approach. Unlike the serious and neutral narrator in Honour, White Teeth’s narrator seems more witty and cynical. The topics of the plot might sound similar, but when approached holistically, each scene has its own distinct story. Although the issues the characters face and the processes they go through might seem a bit similar, the way the two plots are woven and the stories behind them are very different.

Compared in terms of the theme, both novels handle such common themes as emigration, identity crisis, mysticism, religious fundamentalism, ethnicity, multiculturalism etc. Nevertheless, they differ in the way that while Shafak is emphasizing the violence against women, Zadie Smith puts more stress on legacy ethnicity and one’s roots. Shafak uses metaphor of black and white colours while explaining how honour is attributed to masculinity and disgrace to femininity, as for smith, she uses the white teeth metaphor to symbolize the roots and unity of human being. Shafak weaves the theme of ‘honour killing’, (a theme peculiar to the people living in Turkey) through a multicultural point of view (Demir, 2012, p856).

As a final say, considering what the term plagiarism denotes when it comes to the novels and the above results, one can clearly conclude that it would be unfair to claim that Elif Shafak has plagiarized Zadie Smith’s White Teeth.

REFERENCES


Haviland, Carol Peterson; Mullin, Joan A. (2009). Who Owns This Text? Plagiarism, Authorship, and Disciplinary Cultures, Utah State University Press, Logan, USA.


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