Article

Post-Postmodernism, the "Affective Turn", and Inauthenticity

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Abstract: This article considers Rachel Greenwald Smith's concept of the "Affective Turn" in contemporary fiction by looking at a constellation of novels published near the turn of the twenty-first century: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001), and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). As Rachel Greenwald Smith claims, this "Turn" offers a "corrective or counter to postmodernist suspicion towards subjective emotion" and has foundations of sincerity and authenticity, which align it with the premise of post-postmodernism. These novels, I argue, collectively engage with the affective turn's inherent post-postmodern potential, as their authors respond to, challenge, and react against postmodern irony and the license of inauthenticity that comes with this.

Keywords: post-postmodernism; the affective turn; inauthenticity; authenticity; irony; sincerity; David Foster Wallace; Zadie Smith; Jonathan Franzen; Percival Everett

1. Framing Post-Postmodernism

In *Post-postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*, Jeffrey T. Nealon suggests that post-postmodernism signals "the never-ending end of everything". (Nealon 2012, p. ix). He indicates that the term could lead to infinite additions of the prefix "post" as we continually comply with the often reductive scholarly expectations to periodise, historicise, and coin words for new moments or movements in literary culture. Nealon's emphasis on a position in relation to postmodernism is clear from the label "hyper postmodernism" (p. 8), which appears elsewhere in his book but differs from other definitional possibilities for post-postmodernism such as Andrew Hoberek's "antipostmodern" (Hoberek 2007, p. 236) or Charles Harris' "suspiciously lively" postmodern "corpse" (Harris 2002, p. 1). Other terms associated with writing after postmodernism include "metamodernism" (which Timotheus Vermeulen and David James have published significant work on), Gilles Lipovetsky's "hypermodernism", "aftermodernism" (Nicolas Bourriaud), "cosmodernism'" (Christian Moraru), and "digimodernism" (Alan Kirby). As Lee Konstantinou, who turned my attention to this selection of terms, says:

> [...] there are three broad views of our post-postmodern moment. Some see the present as a hyperextension or intensification of postmodernism. Others regard post-postmodernism as an effort to return to a moment before postmodernism (realism, modernism). Still others claim that contemporary writers have moved toward new areas of artistic and cultural concern—that post-postmodernism constitutes a genuine break with the prior cultural dominant. (Konstantinou 2016, p. 37)

I would argue that Konstantinou's list is not exhaustive, as post-postmodernism opens far more doors conceptually than it could ever close, but these "three broad views" (which can also be conflated and combined) demonstrate just how different the motivations of post-postmodernism can be. It all depends on whose hands post-postmodernism is in as a critical idea, or which writer (either explicitly or implicitly) is engaging with its potential facets of literary aesthetics and style. A bottom line, however, is that writing after postmodernism further complicates postmodernism's tricky relationship with authenticity.

As Konstantinou says, "Postmodernism as a literary style, set of theoretical claims, or socioeconomic phenomenon cannot simply be evaded, side stepped, or wished away" (p. 6). Postmodernism offers a set of values that trouble authenticity—namely, interests in irony, experiment, subversion, and manipulation of the real—and this exposes the inauthenticity central to this phase of modernism. But I would disagree with Konstantinou regarding post-postmodernism's inability to move past these values, even if this is a contingent, transitionary process of reclaiming sincerity and authenticity. I am using the words "irony" and "sincerity", which are at the heart of posmodernism's shift to post-postmodernism, on Lionel Trilling's terms, which is to say that they relate to a "congruence between avowal and actual feeling." (Trilling 1972, p. 2). I contend that David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Percival Everett, and Zadie Smith dramatise this shift or transitionary process in their work in different ways, involving different components of twenty-first century sincerity such as resistance of late capitalism, mental health struggle, and racial inequality. These authors are all interested in the *access* to authenticity that these different obstacles limit, but do not prohibit. This article will unpack the persistent attempt to turn postmodern inauthenticity into post-postmodern authenticity at the centre of these authors' most celebrated novels: Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Franzen's *The Corrections*, Everett's *Erasure*, and Smith's *White Teeth*.

The potential oversight in an understanding of post-postmodernism is that the DNA of postmodernism is equally subject to ambivalence and contradiction, from Jürgen Habermas' obsoletion of "the new" and "alliance of postmodernists with premodernists" (Habermas 1981, pp. 4, 14), to Jean-François Lyotard's "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard 1979, p. xxiv), to Fredric Jameson's insistence that a "celebratory posture" or conclusive "moralizing gesture" resists "freezing into place" (Jameson 1989, p. 66). Post-postmodernism arrives as an extension of this: provocatively declaring a new literary moment/movement despite the fact there is conflicting evidence of what the new moment/movement stands for. The specificity of post-postmodernism's timing is subject to interpretation, but the late twentieth and early twenty-first century saw widespread scholarly interest in the idea of writing after the perceived end of postmodernism. Then and now the additional prefix in front of postmodernism is applied to writers at the turn of the century such as Wallace and Franzen, but less often to writers of colour such as Everett and Smith, which is a particular oversight due to the importance of authenticity (competing with externally imposed inauthenticity) to racial identity. I argue that this group's major novels actively stage problematic understandings of post-postmodernism, second-guessing this scholarly debate within the fictional narratives themselves. Rachel Greenwald Smith's concept of the "Affective Turn"—which "chronologically coincides with the end of the postmodernism debates" (Smith 2011, p. 424)—is essential here in understanding how we might distinguish post-postmodernism from postmodernism. This is a movement from prioritising irony over sincerity to hybridising the two, but also to mixing this set of hybrid aesthetics with individual and collective authenticity, which can be achieved via affect. Sincerity and affect are the means, and authenticity constitutes the ends, in other words. As Smith claims, the "Affective Turn" that has come with the post-postmodern moment offers a "corrective or counter to postmodernist suspicion towards subjective emotion" and helps alleviate the problem of "being estranged by the performative distance of postmodernist prose" (pp. 424, 438). I argue that by extension the "corrective" implicated in Smith's turn strives for affective potential while relying on a literary construction of post-postmodern sincerity. Affect is the determining factor for authenticity, ultimately, yet this construction of sincerity is partially anti-affective because we are constantly being shown what is being moved from (postmodern irony) in order to see what is being moved to. Post-postmodernism does not exist definitionally (but also cannot function) without postmodernism. The result is something which has not fully relinquished performativity: performed sincerity, followed by inauthentic authenticity. Trilling claims that sincerity can contain irony in its construction, and I think that this is applicable to the connected term authenticity, which is best understood as the goal of the affective process of acting sincerely. Trilling posits that "the word [sincerity] itself has lost most of its former high dignity [...] if

we speak it, we are likely to do so with either discomfort or irony" (p. 6). The destabilising potential of irony threatens sincerity and authenticity—threatening, as Smith suggests, a "general critical consensus that postmodernist literature tends to be tonally—and therefore affectively—cold" (p. 423). This justifies post-postmodern resistance to coldness. "Cold" could be considered as the antonym of the earnest, warm self-consciousness that, beneath the authenticity paradox I have established, ultimately defines *Infinite Jest*, *The Corrections*, *Erasure*, and *White Teeth*.

This coterie of authors offers a useful insight into the distinction between postmodernism and post-postmodernism because their works directly expose the difficulties yet appeals of the debate. An interconnected case study of these authors and their most famous novels invites a critical conversation about post-postmodernism to match the one being addressed and dramatised within their fiction, I think. Wallace and Franzen were good friends before Wallace's tragic suicide in 2008; Smith wrote of her admiration for Wallace in the essay 'Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace' shortly after his suicide, and mentioned Franzen in the same breath as Wallace in her 2011 columns for *Harper's*; Franzen's 2015 novel *Purity* includes an explicit reference to Smith and he has also discussed her writing in interviews, such as a September 2021 one with Merve Emre for *Vulture*; and Everett's work has an inseparable connection to academia shared by all three of these writers, because it fixates on the limitations of this environment. The academic arena, after all, was pivotal in the twentieth century emergence of postmodernism, and by extension it plays a significant role in the transition to post-postmodernism. Considering their place within what Mark McGurl calls "the Program Era" (alluding to creative writing's growing esteem within the academy), these four authors engage differently with "the struggle between a dominant "conventional realism" and a minority "radical experimentalism"" that McGurl claims to be "an ongoing one" in the postwar university establishment. As he suggests, this is a "classically dialectical struggle in which opposing sides begin, despite themselves, to interpenetrate." (McGurl 2009, p. 33). This co-dependence and these blurred lines between experiment and realism—like those of sincerity and irony, or authenticity and inauthenticity—are responsible for the unresolvable tension between postmodernism and post-postmodernism. It is worth mentioning that this tension has generated scholarly interest in other terms such as the "New Sincerity" (which Konstantinou but also Adam Kelly have done important work on) in a bid to understand the shift from postmodernism to what comes after. The framework for this tension, in the case of these authors, are their ties to institutionalisation, not least because the academy historically gave license to postmodern irony and inauthencity in the first place, due to the university's access to dense, complex literary texts that require teaching in order to read them. As well as all having degrees, their ties are as follows: Everett is a Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Southern California, Smith a tenured professor in the Creative Writing faculty of NYU, and Wallace famously taught at Emerson College (Illinois State University) and Pomona College before his death. Franzen's debut novel—*The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988)—was completed while he was a research assistant at Harvard, beginning a long, fraught relationship with academia.

Embraced by authorial sincerity and impeded by stylistic difficulty in different measures (and at different textual moments of formal experimentation), readers of Wallace, Franzen, Everett, and Smith are included in what Ryan Brooks calls "the contemporary novel's contract with the reader." (Brooks 2017, p. 27). Cautious of the kind of ironic, anti-affective, and manipulative postmodern market logics laid bare by Jameson's extensive work, these authors reimagine late capitalist transactions (between individual autonomy and institutional control) as specifically novelistic pursuits. For Wallace, Franzen, Everett, and Smith, these pursuits begin in academia, where authentic students turned inauthentic consumers are trained to interpret literary value from a text and access something meaningful beneath its formal complexity. Another way of framing this, as Brooks does, is that the free market is responsible for post-postmodernism, because writing after postmodernism can be "understood as the means by which the American novel participates in the neoliberal

turn" (p. 27). Writer and reader freedoms constantly complicate boundaries between sincerity and irony and authenticity and inauthenticity. But if *Infinite Jest*, *The Corrections*, *Erasure*, and *White Teeth* are also suggestive of this "*neoliberal* turn" (emphasis added), they are by pointing to what is being turned from—late capitalist manipulation and postmodern irony. In these four novels, this new, liminal, post-postmodern space is built on this qualified, conflicted author-reader contract: a contract which transgresses its position at the border of the text and occupies fictional space too. These authors use narrative and character to dramatise the fundamental responsibilities to both supply autonomy (the author's) and authentically consume (the reader's) and then turn away and use this agency sincerely in real scenarios. As such, inauthenticity is given a fictional stage, rather than being restricted (like these theoretical concerns surrounding post-postmodernism) to the background of these authors' work. The reader's ability to consume freely is directly influenced by each author's mix of experiment and realism, which is at the core of post-postmodernism's aspirations for sincerity yet attractions to postmodern irony. *Infinite Jest*, *The Corrections*, *Erasure*, and *White Teeth* look at different obstacles troubling authenticity—consumer autonomy, mental health, race—yet share the quality of being narratives specifically about access, of individual characters to authenticity but also to personal fulfilment and existential purpose.

Due to its obsessive use of endnotes, which are borne out of postmodern irony but strive for the authentic communication of necessary affective detail, Wallace's *Infinite Jest* epitomises the endless referentiality and interconnectivity of post-postmodernism. *Jest*'s endnotes play with the idea that obstacles can prevent our access to narrative information, simultaneous to the novel's protagonist Hal Incandenza's difficulty of accessing existential satisfaction due to his struggles with depression and addiction. *Jest* effectively gives Jeffrey Nealon's premise of post-postmodernism as the "never-ending end of everything" a structure, through the multiple textual layers presented by its endnotes. Franzen's most recognised novel—his third, *The Corrections*—invites the adjective "post-postmodern" due to a non-committal, contradictory reaction against postmodern irony. Stephen Burn frames this as a state in limbo, "at the end of Postmodernism" (*Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism*). Undermining the claims of Franzen's own nonfiction—particularly the pre-*Corrections* manifestoes 'Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, a Reason to Write Novels' (1996) and 'Mr. Difficult' (2002)—his novel contradicts his own rejection of postmodern inauthenticity. *The Corrections* instead offers a fiction imbued with the very mechanics Franzen's essays declared exhaustion of, similar to Wallace's negotiations between postmodern influence and writing beyond postmodernism. Konstantinou describes Franzen's novel as "an attempt to dismantle postmodernism" (Konstantinou 2017, p. 115) and Jésus Blanco Hidalga calls it "an updated realist social novel" (Hidalga 2017, p. 1), whereas Stephen Burn suggests that it "simultaneously rejects and accepts the legacy of the postmodern novel." (Burn 2008, p. 91). These conflicting possibilities are further problematised in the characterisation of the Lambert family, who comply with Michel Foucault's assertion that neoliberalism is "nothing at all, or anyway, nothing but always the same thing, and always the same thing but worse." (Foucault 2008, p. 130). The Lambert family's structural patterns of consumer repetition and flawed cycles of self-correction can be read as rehearsals of post-postmodernism's grapple with inauthenticity. Meanwhile, the hyper self-consciousness and metafictional acrobatics of *Erasure*, which are focalised by the experiences of Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, position Everett's mid-career breakout novel as a story about academic and market exclusivity, the systemic oppression of African American literature, and the experiential and material erasure these all induce. Matthew McKnight assigns responsibility of Everett's subversive experimentalism and concerns with an authentic self to "the churn of racialized capitalism." (McKnight 2021). Finally, Smith's *White Teeth* most directly engages with the affective turn. *White Teeth*'s story of the intersecting lives of the Iqbal and Jones families during the second half of the twentieth century centralises a variety of affective journeys towards individual authenticity. At its time of publication, the novel triggered James Wood's infamous claim of Smith's "hysterical realism" (Wood 2000), but it has also brought more productive observations of Smith's

simultaneous postmodernism and realism, a balance which Nick Bentley calls her "main mode" (Bentley 2008, p. 52). Smith's interests in sincerity and authenticity (aesthetically and narratively) suggest that post-postmodernism is also the most fitting designation for her work.

2. Wallace and Franzen

Infinite Jest is as inflected with a necessarily anti-capitalist, post-postmodern response to the changing conditions of twenty-first century society as *The Corrections*, *Erasure*, and *White Teeth*. What separates this novel from the other three is that Wallace looks at this transitionary moment with anticipation, in 1996, before the century change. Due to its structural approach but also its thematic interests, *Jest* can be viewed as an exercise in constructional limitation. It suggests that an aesthetic of meticulous organisation and obsessive patterning—an aesthetic entirely shaped by postmodern irony and experimental play—does not necessarily generate cultural harmony and heterogeny. Wallace's primary storyline of Hal Incandenza's experiences of loneliness, depression, and addiction while at Enfield Tennis Academy (ETA) foregrounds this sense of aesthetic fracture. The nature of Hal's experiences is directly influenced by the way his father's suicide irrevocably disrupts and divides the rest of his family, which is used by the novel as a template for a wider social disunity. Wallace's expansive epic novel is in many ways an extension of the postmodern emphasis on layers and dimensions, with similar temporal scope, accumulated competing narratives, and variety in voice and register to the encyclopaedic fiction of Thomas Pynchon or the scope and density of William Gaddis. But in line with post-postmodern potential, Wallace's novel uses its narrative to demonstrate a movement away from the inauthenticity that can come with these postmodern traits. Structural convergence between the various parts and pieces (concerning different characters, subplots, and timelines) of Wallace's narrative would be the specific result of fulfilled authenticity, in this case. At *Jest*'s centre are Hal's time at ETA, Don Gately's as a recovering addict at Ennet House, the plot involving Rémy Marathe, Helen Steeply, and Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents (the AFR), and the history of the Incandenza family, prior to Hal's father's death. These threads interdepend and collide, meeting at the quest to find out about and find the mythical film directed by Hal's late filmmaker father: "the unreleased cartridge entitled either *Infinite Jest* (V) or *Infinite Jest* (VI)." (Wallace 1996, p. 789). The ninety-seven pages of "NOTES AND ERRATA" (p. 983) that accompany this narrative complexity are comparable to the layers of *Erasure* and *White Teeth*, particularly Everett's use of an eighty-page mock intertext and Smith's emphasis on her contents page, which in her case is the blueprint for a narrative which jumps forwards and backwards chronologically, shifting between the perspectives of many characters. Wallace's endnotes vary from long and precisely detailed (such as number 24: "JAMES O. INCANDENZA: A FILMOGRAPHY" (pp. 985–93)) to short, ironic asides (like 25: "More like July-October, actually" (p. 994)). The notes invariably expand the fictional world of *Jest*, offering an extra layer that can lead to further layers—see 64's instructions for further details on an InterLace "CD-ROM" (p. 997), the directions to return to a previous endnote in 87, or the endnotes within endnote 110. Due to the way that they sometimes mislead, frustrate, or self-deprecate, the notes are where we can specifically locate the transition from postmodern inauthenticity to post-postmodern authenticity in Wallace's novel. The notes do not straightforwardly converge, so this gesture is performed sincerity, but the presence of this performance underlines a sense of honesty, transparency, and truth. This does the fundamental work that a lack of intent to structurally converge or for authenticity to be fulfilled would not. Again, it is a post-postmodern model of negotiation and fluctuation rather than simplicity or linearity.

In line with Nealon's claim of the endless expansion that comes with adding the second "post" to postmodernism, Wallace's endnotes show how his novel adopts a self-reflexive strategy of second-guessing its own critical response, position within the canon, and relevance to scholarly periodisation, not least because of the way they typographically resemble an academic article or book chapter. This is comparable to the self-consciously scholarly

approaches of *The Corrections*, *Erasure*, and *White Teeth*—*Erasure* of course amplifying this by having an academic setting (like Wallace's tennis academy) in which Monk Ellison works as a professor and fiction writer (like Everett himself). As Clare Hayes-Brady identifies, "it is misleading to oppose Wallace to Postmodernism completely"; he is ultimately "an inveterate interrogator of Postmodernism, engaging and dismissing it in equal measure" (Hayes-Brady 2016, p. 50) just like Franzen, Everett, and Smith's ambivalent relationships with the term. *Jest* gestures towards post-postmodern potential through its attempt to circumvent a restrictive, rigid structure of knowledge via additional affective detail. This is an organisational task, as determined by the novel's form, which is at its most heightened in Wallace's endnotes. It then bleeds out into the rest of the novel, influencing the smaller, individual struggles with sincerity and authenticity with specific scenes and characters. If we are to consider Hal the novel's protagonist—which I think it is most productive to – his isolation at ETA is the specific narrative condition setting up a confrontation of anti-affective forces, just like Monk Ellison's struggle within both the university system and the publishing industry, or the Lambert family's struggle to reconnect with each other and escape the market, or Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal's vital struggle to prepare their children for an uncompromising, punishing late twentieth century British society. Hal's confinement is captured in Wallace's opening scene, with him being "seated in an office, surrounded by heads and bodies", owner of the paralysing realisation that "I am in here" (p. 3) and incapable of escaping the fact. This restriction to a solitary subjective experience pervades ETA: "We're all on each other's food chain. All of us. It's an individual sport. Welcome to the meaning of *individual*. We're each deeply alone here. It's what we all have in common here, this aloneness" (p. 112). As the determining factor of why Hal is at ETA, tennis acts as a metaphor for individual consciousness within a communal space, so the court becomes a space to attempt to perform as your liberated, authentic self. The incarceration the novel tries to break free from is within a specific narrative setting and experienced by a specific character, but the novel also strives to be free of a larger "metafictional, postmodern narrative practice", as Nicoline Timmer puts it, which Wallace stages in the relationship between his endnotes and his main prose. As Timmer elucidates, "the subjects or selves in [Wallace's] stories are *locked* in this empty position" (Timmer 2010, pp. 115–16, emphasis added) of a "postmodern narrative practice", and Hal's story specifically works in tandem with the novel's post-postmodern form and structure. Equally, Hal's ironic detachment derives from an inability to channel sincere intentions more productively, but the fact that he always wants to be a more authentic version of himself prevails. *Jest* becomes a demonstration of conflict, caused by the desire to simultaneously rely on postmodern performance and unlock affective potential.

A similarly affective pursuit is at the heart of Franzen's *The Corrections*, a novel which I would also argue stages post-postmodernism's twenty-first century emergence on the level of narrative—in this case, the interconnected subplots of an ensemble cast: the Lambert family. The matriarch, Enid, summarises some of the obstacles of inauthenticity in the way of their collective pursuit retrospectively, at the end of the novel. At this point, the reader has spent over six-hundred pages in the company of Enid's three adult children and husband Alfred, leading up to and then during a Christmas family reunion masterminded by Enid as a way of ironing out their tensions and resolving their disputes In the novel's final chapter, she calls attention to "Gary's materialism and Chip's failures and Denise's childlessness" (Franzen 2001, p. 650) but the list could include Denise's adultery, Chip's professional scandal and its fallout, Gary's mental health crisis, as well as her husband Alfred's declining health and her own overarching failure to hold the family together. These mistakes and errors identify shortcomings of neoliberalism under the difficult conditions of late capitalism. In *The Market Logics of Contemporary Fiction*, Paul Crosthwaite conceives of the technique "Market Metafiction", which it seems Franzen's novel puts in practice. As Crosthwaite elaborates, this is a "mode in which authors reflect upon or allegorize contradictory impulses towards the market in the very process of enacting them." (Crosthwaite 2019, pp. 37–38). The Lamberts embody neoliberalism's

limitations in the face of the "evils of late capitalism", as Enid calls them on page 595, and the nature of these limitations is a threat to their individual sincerity and subsequent ability to be authentic—from Chip's conduct in a professional sphere to Gary's honesty with his wife concerning his depression. Crosthwaite associates market metafiction with "a putative post-postmodern turn" (pp. 37–38), and if Franzen is embracing metafiction here it seems to be synonymous with stepping outside of postmodernism rather than replicating its stylistic tropes and experimental frameworks. Instead, Franzen subverts these, mining the idea of self-reflexivity for its opportunity to better oneself as a person, therefore turning this aesthetic component into a narrative theme and character experience within his fiction.

In this way, the function of the market and the constantly interrupted flow of capital can be compared to post-postmodernism's contentious, contingent development of postmodernism. Rob Turner describes a danger that "the conscious counterfeit might become a dominant American mode" due to the "duplicated and second-hand nature of American culture" (Turner 2019, pp. 3, 7); post-postmodernism is guilty of this by definition and design, due to its reliance on postmodern irony despite a gesture towards post-postmodern sincerity. The threat of this "second-hand nature" is the crux of Franzen's own criticisms of postmodernism in his essays 'Perchance to Dream' and 'Mr. Difficult', but it is also an anxiety dramatised in *The Corrections*' cautionary tale of the Lambert family. The responsibility to break free of market restraints and meaningfully access one own's authenticity falls on Enid, ultimately. She is the only one able to step back from the collective Lambert problem and "correct" it. Enid learns to communicate with her children after the dynamic goes so wrong with her husband. Her clarity lies in how problematic an "exchange of family data" (p. 345) is compared to a functional, reciprocated, real interaction—a conversation with meaning rather than a corporatised, ironic, insincere transaction where someone is trying to get something out of who they are speaking to. At the end of Franzen's novel, his narrator delights in detailing how, in the months following the Christmas reunion, Enid learns that Chip "was going to be the father of twins [...] he then invited Enid to a wedding at which the bride was *seven months pregnant*" (p. 650). Gary also "returned to St. Jude with Jonah a few months after the catastrophic Christmas", where Enid "had nothing but fun with them" (p. 648). The flashforward reveals that Denise too spends valuable time with her mother, during which she "looked so much happier than she had at Christmas", finally comfortable with the fact "that she still didn't have a man in her life or any discernible desire to get one" (pp. 648–49). *The Corrections*' unapologetic emphasis on progress highlights a more concrete fulfilment of authenticity than *Jest*, then. Franzen outlines a more optimistic trajectory for turning towards affect than Wallace's novel and its fraught, demanding efforts to harmonise its main text and its endnotes (and by extension to conclude Hal Incandenza's search for purpose and meaning).

3. Everett and Smith

As novels about access that can be usefully applied to the theoretical framework of post-postmodernism, it is important to consider the fact that Everett's *Erasure* and Smith's *White Teeth* are also about race, which has a vital role in the link between late capitalism and post-postmodernism. These two novels place this issue at the forefront, whereas race is less immediate or urgent as a concern in *Infinite Jest* and *The Corrections*. Everett and Smith's evidence of post-postmodern style undermines the conviction of the "posts" in this term, because there is again a dependence on postmodern but also modernist legacy. Everett and Smith's works emphasise that a component of post-postmodernism's affective turn is an increased awareness of race, which extends the reach of authenticity to a diverse palate of different communities. This coverage is particularly important because of the white male dominance of the postmodern canon, which includes writers such as Gaddis and Pynchon but also John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Don DeLillo, and William H. Gass. Major writers of colour publishing during the postwar, postmodern moment such as Toni Morrison and Ishmael Reed are, despite their experimental interests, not centralised within this phase of modernism to the same extent. The issue is again tied to capitalist restrictions

on individual freedom. As the critic Anthony Stewart explains, Everett's approach to race, which can addresses this issue surrounding postmodernism, extends the paradoxical quality of his work:

> One of the many challenges issued by Everett's fiction is the mundane, although apparently fine and difficult-to-strike balance between being aware that a character is black (and engaging with all the complexities attendant to this status), on the one hand, while simultaneously resisting the urge to become preoccupied exclusively and reductively by that fact, on the other. (Stewart 2017, p. 133)

This "challenge" is self-issued by *Erasure*, whose protagonist Monk Ellison is, like Everett, a writer and professor in California (replacing Everett's USC with UCLA). The authentic truth Monk seeks is to be freely, sincerely, proudly black, but not reducible to this status nor only ever categorised as such. Monk's navigation of the academy and the literary institution in seeking this truth brings barriers that, like a writer of colour engaging with postmodernism in order to correct and write beyond it (as Everett is), illustrate how this is a process of entering spaces that historically exclude people like him.

A "writer of fiction" (Everett 2001, p. 3) with notable similarities to Everett, Monk knows that the colour of his skin dictates whether he is in handcuffs, but it also has jurisdiction over his career, his success, his treatment by academics, editors, publishers. These are the market conditions for the African American writer: a world stacked against them to the extent that Monk spends time walking down bookshop aisles to see whether he is relegated to the black authors table or if he is given as fair a chance as everyone else to be categorised as whatever he wants, be this postmodern experimentalism or social realism. This episode of *Erasure* sees Monk find "a section called African American Studies and there, arranged alphabetically and neatly, read *undisturbed*, were four of my books including my *Persians* of which the only thing ostensibly African American was my jacket photograph" (p. 34). He becomes "quickly irate", his "pulse speeding up" and "brow furrowing", before leaving the store with his sister in tow. Elsewhere in his work on Everett, Anthony Stewart describes Monk as "a victim of forces that he should have known would appropriate and co-opt his original intentions" (Stewart 2020, p. 97), but Monk's character perhaps does not deserve an assessment indicative of blame. Monk is an involuntary subordinate within a career that is supposed to be his, likely a mirror image of Everett's own situation when trying to get a break in the early 1980s. Within the context of post-postmodernism, this discrimination can be viewed as a by-product of the market, academy, and publishing industry's white dominance. Postmodernism depends on these three arenas to different extents, which becomes a preoccupation of post-postmodernism too, and the intersection of its affective turn. Like Smith, Everett applies postmodern legacies of irony and metafiction to a new mode of fiction with a prioritised interest in race, as a means of breaking down barriers and urgently reclaiming authenticity.

This post-postmodern motivation can be traced in *White Teeth*. Alongside Archie Jones and his daughter Irie, Samad Iqbal is a strong contender for the protagonist of Smith's debut novel and can in some ways be compared to Monk Ellison, transferring Monk's embodiment of both postmodern irony and post-postmodern sincerity in American literary spaces to Samad's working class suburban London context. Here, Samad too must self-deprecate but also survive, must confront mistreatment in order to be free (when his access to capital is even more prohibited). As Philip Tew observes, Samad is a conduit for *White Teeth*'s interest in cultural hybridity and racial harmony, showing again where post-postmodern categorisation and hybridisation take on a different, more urgent meaning. Samad represents "a defining split in people's existence, a bifurcation of their lives", which he "makes emphatic by dividing his sons" (Tew 2010, p. 28) between London and Bangladesh (which causes controversy amongst the Iqbal and Jones families). As Tew says, Samad also contains "a subtle inflection of various English traditions, ones that the novel incorporates both in an interrogation and celebration" (Tew 2014, p. 308); or as Z. Esra Mirze puts it, "while he can negotiate the coexistence of national and racial affiliations as interdependent categories, he refuses the erasure of one for the sake of the other."

(Walters 2008, p. 191). Samad is at the centre of various strategies of hybridisation that rely on the exact social responsibility that post-postmodernism aspires towards. Moreover, Samad's resistance to his own "erasure" (as Mirze calls it) is like Monk's, switching Monk's bookshelves for the tables Samad waits while at work at an Indian restaurant. At one point in *White Teeth*, Samad is said to be "wanting desperately to be wearing a sign" that reads "I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER … " (Smith 2000, p. 50). Elsewhere, Samad fills in a visitors' book with "*Name*: Samad Miah Iqbal/*College*: Educated elsewhere (Delhi)/*Research project*: Truth" (p. 223), reminding the characters around him but also the reader that he is more than the job he is overqualified for. It is not just Samad's imagined work nametag—many of Smith's diverse characters are constructed in terms of their page layout at different moments in her text, accentuating their collective need to remind the world around them that they are *as* qualified, intelligent, interesting, and valid as human beings as London's white men and women. Smith's incorporation of postmodern style via experimental page-fracturing techniques, but fusion with social realist sincerity, is a balance of aesthetics and affect that justifies race's position at the heart of *White Teeth*'s post-postmodernism.

With this in mind, it is worth concluding with Smith's teeth metaphor, which gives her novel its title and is a recurring image throughout it. As Nick Bentley identifies, "*white* teeth are a mark of sameness; Smith, however, draws attention to the way in which they have been culturally constructed to mark out difference" (Bentley 2008, p. 55). The discontent towards racial inequality at the forefront of *White Teeth*'s turn towards affect is well explained on the terms of teeth. The narrator's words at the beginning of the final chapter of Archie's section of the novel, which lean on the idea of tooth "marrow", shed light on this:

> A propos: it's all very well, this instruction of Alsana's to look at the thing close up; to look at it dead-straight between the eyes; an unflinching and honest stare, a meticulous inspection that would go beyond the heart of the matter to its marrow, beyond the marrow to the root—but the question is how far back do you want? How far will *do*? The old American question: what do you want—*blood*? (p. 72)

This process of pivoting from the present—turning to the past in order to look again in a forward direction (a *definitive* gesture for post-postmodernism due to its reliance on postmodern legacy)—renders a "meticulous inspection that would go beyond the heart of the matter" inevitable. The "inspection" is one of tracing roots and using a magnifying glass to accentuate the authentic dental detail. Doing this, *White Teeth* notices the deep problems of the past, their severity directly correlating with "how far back" and how deep Smith goes. In the context of post-postmodernism's relationship with postmodernism, the problems are specifically related to pervasive whiteness and a lack of diversity. Andrzej Gasiorek suggests that in *White Teeth*, "the past is to be expunged so that a completely new beginning might be imagined; it isn't old roots or new links that are desired, but a *tabula rasa* where the self can be remade without reference to any antecedents." (Gasiorek 2012, p. 178). Perhaps this is the result of post-postmodernism's important fusion with a turn towards affect: a "*tabula rasa*" that eventually, after working through the dependence on postmodernism, arrives somewhere genuinely, authentically new.

Smith's novel looks at *why* the past must "be expunged", which means it cannot be removed from the equation completely. In a chapter for *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays*, Maeve Tynan suggests that "In Smith's novels identity is as much about forging links in the present as it is about staking a claim on the past" (Walters 2008, p. 74), and "staking a claim" demands a significant amount of time spent with or in that past, which is something post-postmodernism is guilty of when appropriating postmodern irony, which Smith's novel consciously moves on from in the end, only using irony to access sincerity and say something real. Its stylistics are postmodern on the surface, but ultimately the novel's elaborate contents page and its experimental page-fracturing devices are a vital roadmap for Smith's complex realism and an accurate depiction of how fractured daily experiences are for marginalised communities, respectively. *White Teeth*'s progress, like *Erasure*'s, signals

a less complicated relationship between the two concepts of sincerity and irony than is arguably the case in twenty-first century post-postmodern fiction more broadly. More so than *Infinite Jest* and *The Corrections* (which are more complicit with the postmodern debts in this relationship), *Erasure* and *White Teeth* display assurance that withstanding the inauthenticity that comes with postmodern irony eventually leads to something—something more realistic and less idealised than the conclusion to the Lambert family's story, for instance. Through Monk Ellison and the Iqbal and Jones families, Everett and Smith declaratively point at specifically *how* inauthenticity can be transformed into authenticity. Wallace's Hal Incandenza and Franzen's Lamberts, however, go to lengths showing missteps before they arrive at something more hopeful, even if these missteps are realistic by-products of Hal's adolescent mental health struggle and the Lamberts' conditioning by the market. From all four novels, we learn that institutionalisation is the recurrent problem across these different contexts. Individualism's challenge to this sets up the tension that others— between postmodernism and post-postmodernism, irony and sincerity, and authenticity and inauthenticity—all point towards. The turn of the twenty-first century set the precedent that contemporary fiction remains anchored by, because the individual will exist long after post-postmodernism is itself replaced by whatever comes next.

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