

# ECHOES OF BAKHTIN: NAVIGATING STYLISTICS MARVELS IN MOHSIN HAMID'S THE LAST WHITE MAN

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## Article Info



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## Abstract

This paper examines Mohsin Hamid's novel "The Last White Man" through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, focusing on the stylistic construction of diverse voices and perspectives within the narrative. Drawing on stylistic analysis methods, the study argues that the novel achieves a wide-ranging social harmony despite the superficial racial transformations experienced by individual characters. By granting each character a distinct voice and viewpoint, Hamid transcends a singular authorial vision and embraces the polyphonic nature of the novel as a genre. This approach aligns with Bakhtin's celebration of the novel's capacity to accommodate multiple viewpoints and generate diverse interpretations. Through its stylistic analysis, the paper ultimately demonstrates how "The Last White Man" achieves a complex tapestry of perspectives, culminating in a nuanced exploration of social harmony in the face of individual transformation.

## Keywords:

*Polyphony, Stylistic Analysis, Social Harmony, The Last White Man, Mohsin Hamid, Bakhtin.*

## Introduction

Basically, there's been a change in how stories are told. Before, it was all about the author's voice and one perspective. But now, there are new ways of narrating that break away from that traditional style. These new forms match the shift in storytelling methods. New forms of fiction writing emerged, influenced by the power dynamic, including the adoption of a multiple voice narrative through various points of view. In this narrative style, readers encounter numerous perspectives.

The concept of polyphony, coined by Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895–1975), a renowned literary theorist of the 20th century, finds its most notable expression in Dostoevsky's novels. Dostoevsky's novels are known for their unique feature: a variety of distinct voices and perspectives. Instead of having a single authorial consciousness guiding the story, his works showcase a multitude of consciousnesses, each with its own valid worldview. These individual consciousnesses coexist and interact within the narrative, creating a unified event while maintaining their separate identities.

Bakhtin credits Dostoevsky as the pioneer of the polyphonic novel. While he acknowledges some polyphonic elements in earlier writers, Bakhtin asserts that it is through Dostoevsky's work that polyphony is fully realized with all its characteristics in the novel genre.

After Dostoevsky, the use of polyphony in narrative structure expanded, particularly in modern novels experimenting with various forms. Various authors embraced polyphony as a common narrative mode. Postmodern fiction, in particular, employs polyphony in diverse ways to address different objectives, including the examination of concepts like language and truth. Stevenson contends that postmodernism prolongs the modernist sense of uncertainty regarding these concepts.

For Zappen, “polyphony is a process of creating and testing ideas, a process that engages the author and the readers as well as the characters in the polyphonic novel.”

In a monological novel, characters serve as mere vessels for the author's ideas, lacking their own independent voices. The narrative is driven by a single consciousness, with the characters existing solely to convey the author's perspective. On the other hand, in a polyphonic narrative, multiple voices and perspectives are present, allowing characters to have their own unique identities and viewpoints.

But in a polyphonic novel, everything is shaped by the creative objective or purpose at hand. i.e. “the task of constructing a polyphonic world and destroying the established forms of the basically monological (homophonic) European novel.” (Bakhtin, M. M.1984,p. 5) .Bakhtin not only highlights the presence of multiple characters in novels but also emphasizes their autonomy from each other and from the author.

Bakhtin stresses the importance of incorporating multiple voices because he believes that each individual has a unique aspect of themselves that can only be revealed through their own conscious expression. This personal essence cannot be fully captured or defined by someone else.

In 2007, Coupland explored how African Americans strategically employ linguistic variables to conceal or sidestep certain associations. He noted that individuals may present authentic identities, such as being African American, gay men, or drag queens. However, their primary focus is often on adopting fictional identities, particularly as ‘white women’ during performances (Coupland, 2007, p. 165).The drag persona of these performers challenges conventional social categorization, presenting an inversion of their ‘real’ identities as white, heterosexual, upper-class women (Bakhtin, M.M., 2016).

## Problem statement

A study to evaluate the Bakhtinian insights into the stylistic landscape of Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" presents a compelling research endeavor. This research delve into the polyphonic elements within the narrative, unraveling the interplay between characters and the socio-political context.

## Objectives

This paper aims to achieve the following goals:

1. To explore the stylistic nuances of Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" by applying Bakhtin's theories of polyphony in literary analysis.
2. Examining Bakhtin's theory of polyphony in Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man," where characters exist independently of the author's influence. Each character's voice holds equal significance, showcasing a high degree of autonomy in their perspectives (Thornborrow, J. and Wareing, S. 1998).
3. Illustrating how the novel is perceived and analyzed as a 'polyphonic' narrative, wherein the voices of the characters remain distinct and separate from the author's voice.
4. Inspecting the stylistic connection between Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man" and Bakhtin's polyphony, researchers aim to highlight diverse voices within the text, showcasing Hamid's distinctive literary style.

## Research Questions

1. How far stylistics nuances of Mohsin Hamid's The Last White Man can be explored under the lens of Bakhtinian polyphony?
2. Is the novel "The Last White Man" a polyphonic narrative?
3. Does postmodern fiction employ polyphony in diverse ways?

## Significance of study

The present research is significant because it seeks to illuminate how linguistic multivoice strategies contribute to the nuanced stylistic fabric of the novel, shedding light on the ways in which Mohsin Hamid navigates and challenges conventional literary forms. This study highlights diverse ways of Bakhtinian polyphony in postmodern fiction, enhance comprehension of Bakhtin's theory, specifically regarding component utilization. Additionally, the research establishes a groundwork for subsequent investigations.

## Delimitation

The researcher analyze selected passages from the novel The Last White Man. Researcher's own perspectives of analyzing polyphony may influence the interpretations. The researcher narrows the analysis to specific aspect of Bakhtinian theory, i.e. polyphony. These limitations help provide a clear scope for the research to analyze Bakhtinian heteroglossia from the text of novel.

## Literature review

### Stylistics analysis: A critical approach

Stylistics investigates linguistic elements, like figures of speech and sentence structures, aimed at creating expressive or literary styles. The concept of style has been a longstanding focus of study, viewed as the proper embellishment of thought by Aristotle, Cicero, Demetrius, and Quintilian. This approach cataloged style devices, particularly those prevalent in the Renaissance period. Aspects such as mood, pacing,

narrator's point of view(single voice, multivoice), symbolism, theme, and tone are key elements explored in the analysis of literary works. Mood pertains to the emotional atmosphere, pacing to the narrative speed, tone reflects the writer's attitude and language choices.

H.G. Widdowson (1986) defines Stylistics as, "The study of literary discourse from a linguistics orientation."

### **Levels of Stylistics**

Leech and Short (2007) state that there are various stylistic analysis levels, such as

Grammatical level, which examines grammar.

Syntactic Level, and part of speech to clarify the writer's intention.

Morphological level, as defined by Mark and Kirsten (2005), deals with word formation and the internal structure of words.

Semantic level encompasses pragmatics, exploring meanings and characters' perspectives.

Pragmatics emphasizes uncovering hidden meanings in literary texts and discusses how readers perceive invisible meanings within the text.

Lexical level concentrates on the utilization of nouns and verbs, examining the choice of words in terms of simplicity or complexity, archaic or modern usage, and whether they are concrete or abstract. This analysis also considers unique words and those borrowed from different languages. Abstract nouns highlight the characters' mental states, while concrete nouns describe their physical appearance, as suggested by Bakhtin (1981).

Thornborrow and Wareing (1998) highlight three key dimensions of stylistics essential for analyzing literary texts. These dimensions include

- utilizing linguistics to approach such texts.
- evaluating them based on objective criteria rather than subjective impressions.,
- placing emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of language, such as the ability of rhyme to provide enjoyment.

The researcher look forward to analyze the morphological and semantic aspects in connection with the Bakhtinian approach. This approach is specifically related to the point of view in the novel and the themes of grief, loss, white privileges, Societal collapse and racial prejudice. These two levels, morphological and semantic, play a significant role in understanding and exploring these aspects of the novel. The researcher delve into the interaction between different meanings and forms within the text.

### **Mohsin Hamid's Biography**

Mohsin Hamid is a Pakistani novelist and essayist who was born in Lahore in 1971. His works are characterized by a compelling array of voices and viewpoints. With beautiful prose and perceptive social criticism, he captures the intricacies of the postcolonial world in his writing that cuts over boundaries and genres. Hamid Mohsin Hamid's early years were spent in Pakistan, the US, and the Philippines, which helped to shape his international viewpoint and cultural sensitivity. He honed his technique under the tutelage of well-known writers like Salman Rushdie and Toni Morrison while pursuing his creative writing studies at Princeton University and Lahore University of Management Sciences.

With the publication of his first book, *Moth Smoke* (2000), he shot to fame in the literary world. Narrated by a disillusioned expatriate Pakistani returning to his native land. Hamid became well-known thanks to this polyphonic masterwork, which was shortlisted for both the Dublin IMPAC Prize and the Booker Prize.

Hamid's ability to skillfully weave complex narratives from a variety of perspectives was evident in his later novels. In the wake of 9/11, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) explores the intricacies of postcolonial identity and the collision of civilizations. In the 2017 magical realist film *Exit West*, a couple fleeing a war-torn nation of unspecified name is followed as they navigate migration and displacement. The 2013 satirical social commentary *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* uses a combination of magical realism and realism to portray the social upheavals and economic prosperity in modern-day Pakistan.

**The Polyphonic Influence of Hamid:** Hamid has received praise from all around the world for his literary efforts. Among the many honors bestowed upon him are the Kora Award, the Grin Zane Cavour Prize, and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. His writings have been translated into more than 40 languages, reaching a readership eager to explore his complex stories. The secret to Mohsin Hamid's creative brilliance is his ability to arrange voices into a harmonious whole. He skillfully combines intimate tales with more general social and political criticism to produce stories that appeal to people of many origins and cultures. The ability of writing to heal divisions and promote understanding in a complicated and interrelated world is demonstrated by his body of work.

### **The Last White Man: Thematic concerns**

Hamid introduces theme of grief in *The Last White Man* as Anders undergoes a profound transformation, grieving the loss of his white identity. Throughout the narrative, characters silently mourn the shift in their society, grappling with the loss of their white identities. Hamid also explicitly addresses grief through the deaths of Oona's father and brother, exploring its impact on Oona's mother, who turns to conspiracy theories for solace. Mortality is a significant theme in *The Last White Man*. Oona's mother, deeply affected by the sudden death of Oona's father and the gradual demise of her brother, leading to a pervasive sense of paranoia. Despite anxieties, Anders and Oona, by the novel's end, establish a routine of visiting a graveyard to honor Anders's deceased parents. They embrace the impermanence of life, accepting mortality and living alongside death rather than avoiding it.

Hamid portrays a society achieving widespread social harmony.. Freed from concerns about racial prejudice, mortality, and grief, Anders and Oona embrace their new identities, building a family and embodying renewed optimism. Symbolically embracing the harmonious present, the daughter politely redirects her grandmother from dwelling on the past, exemplifying a forward-looking approach.

*The Last White Man* explores the theme of race as a social construct by portraying a society where individuals undergo a superficial transformation of race.. Anders, now a dark-skinned man, faces hostility from racists, recognition from other brown individuals, and complex reactions from characters like Oona. The societal shift into chaos highlights the absurdity of surface-level changes dictating human interactions. Racial prejudice is a central theme in *The Last White Man*, representing hostility toward other races based on unfounded opinions. The narrative introduces this theme as Anders undergoes a transformation and reacts with intense anger upon seeing his dark reflection, revealing underlying racism .Societal collapse , the narrative depicts an anarchic state with a surge in suicides, individual confrontations, riots, and aggressive paramilitary groups roaming the streets. As a substantial number of people undergo the transformation, the narrative shifts towards society emerging from the destructive chaos, initiating a process of rebuilding. When Anders undergoes a transformation, losing the privileges associated with

being white. In this altered state, Anders experiences a sense of loss and anger. However, as more people undergo the same transformation, white privilege diminishes, rendering the remaining white individuals almost invisible. By the story's conclusion, the societal advantages tied to being white are nearly forgotten, except by characters like Oona's mother, who clings to the past's perceived glory despite its irrelevance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to accomplish the goals of this research, Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* will be subjected to the Bakhtinian concept of "Polyphony" in a trial in order to gain a comprehensive comprehension of the book primarily based on linguistic data.

### **Methodology**

According to Bakhtin's polyphonic narrative theory, a new writing technique that many writers are utilizing in their literary texts, the researchers plan to analyze the polyphonic features of Hamid's *The Last White Man*. This technique allows different personalities to express their opposing viewpoints completely freely without being constrained by the author's voice. The focus of the article will be on the several self-determining consciousnesses that share similar and identical viewpoints and ideals, rather than the plot or the characters. Bakhtin's theory aims to gather a group of people and observe their various responses and modes of self-expression. It appears as though multiple characters, rather than a single author, wrote the story. Focus has shifted

### **Data Analysis**

*The Last White Man* is a political fiction by Mohsin Hamid. Multiple voices are used in Mohsin Hamid's "The Last White Man," which is a sophisticated and captivating narrative device. The characters in Hamid's *The Last White Man* are free to express their inner struggles and consciousness in accordance with the plurality of consciousness, free from the effect of the authors' supremacy. They convey their message to readers through speech, even when they might possess opposing and disparate frames of view.

One morning Anders,.....please, not to begin.(Hamid's *The Last White Man* ,2022, p.9)

Bakhtinian polyphony is demonstrated in this combined paragraph by the intricacy of Anders' internal monologue and opposing feelings. A dynamic interplay of ideas and emotions is revealed as the story takes shape inside Anders through a variety of voices and points of view. There's a hint of doubt and hesitation when you first notice that he looks different. The reasoning of optical illusions clashes with the unpleasant recognition of a changed self as he struggles with the unexpected sensations and perceptions. This internal struggle encapsulates Anders's multitude of voices. The polyphony is amplified in the final section of book when Anders sees his altered reflection and is overcome with murderous hatred. Anders's strong, contradictory voice is represented by his desire to get rid of this altered version of himself, revealing a battle for control of his feelings. The actions that follow, like hitting his fist against the mirror, highlight Anders's discordant inner voice even more. Layers are added to the polyphonic story as the physical act becomes a symbolic attempt to repress or erase the altered identity. The last line In which Anders hides behind the covers and wishes the day would never come, suggests a persistent internal struggle and an unwillingness to face the altered world.

This reluctance highlights the continuous conflict between acceptance and rejection and gives the polyphony another depth. Ultimately, competing voices, ideas, and emotions coexist in Anders, exhibiting Bakhtinian polyphony and producing a complex and rich narrative texture.

Anders waited for.....that should not exist.(Hamid's *The Last White Man* ,2022, p.10-11)



In this scene, Anders’s growing emotional turmoil as he deals with the fallout from his new identity is a clear example of Bakhtinian polyphony. The story presents a symphony of voices, ideas, and feelings that reflect his polyphonic personality experience. Anders’s sense of victimhood and horror are introduced by his need for an undoing and his knowledge that he has been robbed. The intricacy of voices within him is highlighted by the fact that he views the crime as both an internal loss of self and an exterior theft. The constant monitoring and the loss-apprehension authority over his own body, and the unsettling violent thoughts lead to a frantic mental conversation. The attempt to comfort himself by eating a sandwich reveals a conflicted voice looking for peace in the midst of chaos. But the underlying doubt and confusion remain, exposing the continuous internal conflict. Anders alternates between wanting to think he’ll go back to his further layers to the polyphony are the old self and the increasing cynicism. The emotional struggle is heightened by his examination of his own bodily characteristics, such as his hair texture and toenail color. Examining his own body closely becomes a way for him to express the many voices that doubt his identity and very existence. Everywhere there is tension and discomfort element of his subjective and objective experience, enhancing the story’s polyphonic quality. In the end, the book captures the core of Bakhtinian polyphony by depicting a rich tapestry of opposing voices within Anders as he struggles with the significant impact of his transformed identity.

The bicycle ride .....satisfaction at being touched.(Hamid’s *The Last White Man* ,2022, p.15-17)

This section demonstrates Bakhtinian polyphony through the interactions between Anders and Oona, the exchange of views, and the complexity of emotions. The story depicts a variety of voices and experiences that influence the events as they happen. A socioeconomic viewpoint is introduced by Oona’s bicycle ride across the town’s various neighborhoods, which show a shift from wealthy to impoverished places. The narrative is given depth by the depiction of the vacant storefronts and open businesses, which highlights the variety of voices in the metropolis scenery. When they go to Anders’ cabin, the contrast between Oona’s expectation and Anders’ sudden metamorphosis takes center stage. Oona’s feelings and ideas show a wide range of viewpoints, from astonishment to uneasiness. The disclosure of Anders’ altered The intricate network of voices is enhanced by Oona’s honest expression of her thoughts and her appearance. The polyphony is further enhanced by the depiction of Anders’ living quarters, his literature, and Oona’s recollections of him as a youth. His historical traits and current appearance clash, producing a dynamic interplay of voices that echoes the complexity of identity. Anders and Oona’s sexual encounter sets up a subtle investigation of physical closeness and self-perception. With a certain amount of caution and doubt, the act becomes a shared experience that symbolizes the inner problems that both characters are going through. The narrator acknowledges the voyeuristic element, which adds another layer to the polyphony by noting the various points of view that potential viewers may have. All things considered, Bakhtinian polyphony in this work is apparent in the way that different viewpoints, feelings, and character dynamics merge. The depiction of identity, relationships, and the fluidity of personal experiences are all made more interesting by the narrative’s intricacy.

On her day off ..... be able, and teach.( Hamid’s *The Last White Man* ,2022, p.22-23)

The paragraph demonstrates the Bakhtinian polyphony by contrasting Oona’s introspective thoughts with her outside sensations when she goes about her city vacation. Many voices, emotions, and points of view are included in the story as it develops, creating a complicated depiction of Oona’s relationships with the outside world and her inner world. As Oona struggles with the contrast between her old life in the city and her present reality, it highlights her internal conflict. The city takes on symbolic meaning for her, providing a sense of familiarity and belonging, but the realization of the difficulties in going back gives her thoughts more nuance. The story’s polyphonic quality is aided by this tension between realism and yearning. Another level of polyphony is introduced by the way Oona's conversation with her buddy is portrayed. Oona uses their conversation as a forum to express her sentiments regarding her brother, a subject she

wasn't sure she wanted to bring up at first. The change in attitude and the recognition of the intricate interplay of voices is enhanced by the passage of time.

The polyphony is made more difficult by the examination of Oona's night out in the city, which includes wine, bars, dancing, and the proposal. The internal struggle between want and exhaustion, the thought of taking someone home with you, and the final choice to say no, all serve to highlight the complexity of Oona's experience. The narrative is enhanced by the contrast between the external social interactions and the private pondering. The utilization of sensory details, such as the bloodied sky, draws attention to how intense Oona's voyage was emotionally. The story follows the cadence of her ideas and experiences, resulting in a polyphonic composition that speaks to the complexity of human wants and emotions. The revelation that Oona is teaching her midday session as she drives back on the highway adds even more depth to the polyphony. Layers are added to the story by the contrast between Oona's professional responsibilities and her personal experiences in the city, which highlights the complexity of Oona's identity and the range of roles she plays. In conclusion, Bakhtinian polyphony is expertly interwoven throughout the text by the interaction between Oona's conversations with her companion, her own introspection, and her outside experiences in the city.

To his boss, Anders .... About being a smoker. ( Hamid's *The Last White Man* ,2022, p.25-27)

This passage's example of Bakhtinian polyphony involves the conflicting viewpoints between Anders and his supervisor, the changing gym environment with its implicit norms and expectations, and Anders' internal battle to reconcile his new identity with social expectations as well as the recurring themes of suspicion and monitoring. These components come together to form a complicated story that examines the intricacies of social interactions, identity, and self-perception. This paragraph exemplifies Bakhtinian polyphony through its examination of Oona's job ambiguity, social media societal expectations, and the disparate settings of Anders' gym and the yoga studio. The conversations both inside and outside contribute to a complex story that explores the intricacies of contemporary life and personal identity.

Anders and Oona did.....somehow, smiled.(Hamid's *The Last White Man* ,2022, p.94)

This section demonstrates Bakhtinian polyphony through the interaction of voices and viewpoints. There are other characters in the story, including Anders, Oona, and Oona's grandma, who all provide something to the overall story. The grandmother tries to evoke a sense of the past and tradition in her role as the authoritative voice. Oona, however, breaks up this speech with a straightforward but impactful "stop," ushering in a period of defiance and personal expression. As disparate voices and points of view collide, this disruption produces a polyphonic texture. In addition to the generational divide, Oona and her grandmother's opposing feelings of humiliation, rage, and loss also contribute to the tension. When Oona holds onto her grandmother's hands and then kisses her knuckles, it symbolizes a reunion where the opposing voices come to a temporary understanding. This text's polyphonic interplay of voices and emotional negotiation serves as an example of the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony.

Oona worried less ..... and miraculously she let him.

This chapter demonstrates Bakhtinian polyphony by highlighting the intricacies of the family relations through the simultaneous existence of various voices and views. One voice is represented by Oona's concerns for her daughter, which are the result of her constant search for indications of wounds. The daughter's enigmatic expression, however, adds another level of context and opens up a conversation about feelings and unsaid ideas. The dynamics of the family, particularly during times of dispute, highlight the interaction of voices. The polyphonic texture gains depth from Oona's emotional struggle between secretly enjoying her daughter's assertiveness and feeling furious at the same time. The couple's love life



transition represents a common experience, but when their daughter unexpectedly enters the picture, different viewpoints become apparent. A distinct polyphony of emotions is introduced in this scene as Anders reaches out to his daughter, notices her enigmatic countenance, and imagines her past. These emotions include parental worry, the daughter's unsaid concerns, and Anders' reflection on the future. A moving harmony of voices is produced by the physical contact and the envisioned future, highlighting the complex interweaving of different experiences within the family.

## Findings

Although the degree and usefulness of polyphony's diversity are debatable, Hamid's "The Last White Man" does use it in a number of intriguing ways. It is discovered that the novel's narrative style and structure are key factors in giving it a polyphonic structure. In order to create a new harmony and symphony, authors are now realizing their positions as those of authority over a multiple-voiced story and letting their characters speak for themselves.

## Conclusions

Mohsin Hamid's *The Last White Man* is polyphonic novel, following are the ways it is emphasized;

**Changing viewpoints:** Several characters, including the main character Anders, his childhood friend Olinka, and other people they meet along the way, see the story as it is told. This change in perspective enables readers to experience the intricacies of race, identity, and societal change from a variety of angles and see the world through new glasses.

**Internal monologues:** Hamid deftly uses internal monologues to explore his characters' inner feelings and thoughts. This makes it easier for readers to relate to them on a more personal level by giving them a better grasp of their goals, anxieties, and hopes.

**Contrastive perspectives and experiences** are paired side by side in Hamid's work to emphasize the novel's themes' complex nature. The contrast between Anders's affluent background and Olinka's underprivileged status, for example, highlights the disparities present in the evolving racial environment.

**Dialogue and interaction:** The usage of several voices is further emphasized by the dynamic interplay between characters in dialogue. The tensions that develop between them, the language they use, and their communication styles all add to the narrative's depth and richness.

**Unreliable narrators:** Some characters have prejudices and limits in their viewpoints, such as Anders. This forces readers to actively interact with the material by challenging the data it presents and developing their own theories.

All things considered, the usage of several voices in "The Last White Man" is not only a stylistic decision but also an essential component in delving into the main topics of the book. It makes it possible to comprehend race, identity, and the shifting power relations in a world that is changing dramatically in a complex and multidimensional way.

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