Citation for published version


DOI

Link to record in KAR

http://kar.kent.ac.uk/3267/

Document Version

UNSPECIFIED

Copyright & reuse
Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

Versions of research
The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version. Users are advised to check http://kar.kent.ac.uk for the status of the paper. Users should always cite the published version of record.

Enquiries
For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact: researchsupport@kent.ac.uk

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html
Checking your Typeset Proof

Multi-Authored Papers
In the case of multi-authored papers, authors are advised to collaborate when checking the typeset proof. One author should be nominated to either accept or submit corrections on behalf of all of the authors of the paper. We can only accept one set of revisions, or one acceptance of the typeset proof, from the nominated author. Once an author approves the typeset proof further revisions may not be requested.

Replying to us
After you review the typeset proof, you need to click on the ‘Author Verify Typeset Proof’ button (available at the link you downloaded the typeset proof from). You will then need to select the appropriate option to proceed.

Option 1: Accept Typeset Proof
To be selected when your paper is ready for publication
- Please thoroughly check the typeset proof before accepting it. You will not have further opportunities to make additional changes after the typeset proof has been accepted.
- Once you have accepted the typeset proof of your paper it will be ready to be published. You will be notified when your paper has been published and given instructions on how to access the published version.

Option 2: Request Resubmission of Typeset Proof
To be selected when your paper requires corrections
- Please see section on ‘Documenting your Corrections’.
- The typesetter will receive notification of your requested corrections. Once the corrections have been completed you will be notified of the availability of a revised typeset proof for your approval.

Bibliographical Details
Please note that full bibliographical details (issue and page numbers) will not be available until final publication of your paper. Once your paper has been published you will be able to obtain these details. We will notify you as soon as your paper is published.
Checklist for Reviewing the Typeset Proof

We recommend that you print the typeset proof and proofread it slowly and with great care. Request that a colleague also proofread your paper as they may notice errors that you may miss due to your familiarity with the content.

Remember to check your typeset proof for:
- Completeness: inclusion of all text, figures, illustrations and tables
- Correct title and subtitle
- Correct authorship and order of authors
- Current affiliation details
- Heading levels
- Position and size of illustrations and figures
- Matching of captions to illustrations and figures
- Position of tables
- Presentation of quotes
- Presentation of equations
- Footnotes and footnote numbering
- Inclusion of acknowledgements
- References and reference style
- Typesetting or conversion errors

Please check the Journal Standard Style prior to requesting changes to style as we adhere to standard presentation requirements for all papers to ensure consistency throughout the Journal.

It is important that all of your corrections (and those of your co-authors if applicable) are submitted to us in one communication.

Please note that careful proofreading is solely your responsibility.
Journal Standard Style

Order of the Paper:
1. Cover page
2. Copyright/imprint page
3. Paper: title/subtitle; author names with affiliation; abstract; keywords; body of paper; acknowledgement (if applicable); reference list; appendix (if any); about the author section
4. Journal colophon

Journal Standard Style:
- Paper title/subtitle and all headings appear in Title Case whereby only definite and indefinite articles (e.g. ‘the’ and ‘a’), conjunctions (e.g. ‘and’), and prepositions (e.g. ‘in’, ‘of’ etc.) appear in lower case.
- No italics in titles and subtitles.
- Affiliation of the author will include only the name of the author, university or organization name and country. Honorifics are not included.
- Abstract will appear in italics as a single paragraph.
- No italics included in the keyword list.
- No footnotes attached to title/subtitle, authors or the abstract.
- The first paragraph of the paper will appear in floating style - first three words appear in capital case and bold.
- Footnotes within tables have separate numbering to that of the footnotes within the paper.
- Hyphenation cannot be altered.
- No underline will be included.
- Figure captions are centred below the figure. The figure number and caption appear on the same line.
- Table titles appear above the table, left justified, in bold. The table number and table title appear on the same line.
- Flow of columns: If a figure or table appears in the middle of the page then the flow of the text will be from top left column to top right column, followed by table or figure. The remaining text will begin in the left column under the figure/table and will continue in the bottom right column.
- About the Author section: The honorific will reflect in this section. Contact details such as email addresses will not be included.
Documenting your Corrections

Changes to the Abstract
If you wish to make changes to the abstract of your paper please provide the revised
abstract either as a Word document (if there are also changes to the text), or by entering it
in the text box provided when you select Option 2.

Additional Authors
If you need to add a co-author we require the following information for each additional
author to be added:
   1. Name of the co-author
   2. Affiliation details
   3. Email address of the co-author (Mandatory)
   4. Short Biography (limit of 30 words)
   5. Long Biography (limit of 200 words one paragraph only)

Corrections to Text
If you have changes to the text please complete these in the Word version of your paper
available at the link where you downloaded this PDF (or an existing word version). You
can then upload the revised document for typesetting by selecting Option 2.

Corrections to Style:
You will need to clearly indicate all corrections in the following manner:

1. Page Number - paragraph number - line number - correction to be made
   eg:
   1. Page 4 - last paragraph, line 4, please put a comma after Tom in the sentence Mary,
      Tom, Jane and her friends...

   The page number is the actual page of the PDF. As the paper has not been paginated yet,
   no numbers appear on the pages.

Submitting Corrections
Click the ‘Author Verify Typeset Proof’ button (available at the link you downloaded the
typeset proof from) and select Option 2.

Option 2: Request Resubmission of Typeset Proof
   - Please upload the corrected Word document, or add your instructions for
corrections in the text box provided
   - Note that you can only upload one document, and this document must contain all
     of the corrections (and those of your co-authors if applicable).

The typesetter will receive notification of your requested corrections. Once the
corrections have been completed you will be notified of the availability of a revised
typeset proof for your approval.
Shared and Told Tales: Multiculturalism and Participatory Narrative Identities in Zadie Smith’s ‘White Teeth’

Jeremy David Scott
Shared and Told Tales: Multiculturalism and Participatory Narrative Identities in Zadie Smith’s ‘White Teeth’

Jeremy David Scott, University of Kent, Kent, UK

Abstract: This paper proposes that Zadie Smith’s novel ‘White Teeth’ enacts an intriguing response to current debates surrounding multiculturalism and identity in contemporary England through its insistence on the value of shared and participatory narratives. This issue is very much of the moment, given current debates within these islands on globalisation, on the post-devolution climate of the UK and its modern place in the world, and on matters connected to migration and shared identity. Firstly, Salman Rushdie’s views on multiculturalism will be explored; principally, his view of the concept as a ‘cop-out’ and his call for a ‘third way’ which lies somewhere in between laissez-faire multiculturalism and outright assimilation. A paradigm of this vision may be found in the portrayal of Delhi in Midnight’s Children, and there are parallels to be drawn between Rushdie’s Delhi and Smith’s London. Following this, Homi Bhabha’s theories on the relationship between identity and narrative form will be discussed and applied, i.e, of pedagogic (passively received) notions of national history versus performative (shared constructions) of it. White Teeth illustrates both the potentialities and pitfalls of multiculturalism, and sees a resolution in a Bhabha-like sharing of stories. Samad’s and Archie’s lives cross-cross, part and reunite, until at the end Samad remarks: ‘This ... will keep us two boys going for the next forty years. It’s the story to end all stories. It is the gift that keeps on giving.’ The two protagonists have completed a shared re-telling of their life stories, and thus a joint construction through narrative of shared history and, perhaps, shared identity.

Keywords: Narrative Theory, Narrative Technique, Free Indirect Discourse, Multiculturalism, Identity, The Novel, Homi Bhabha, Zadie Smith, Contemporary English Fiction

In the introduction to an essay on Zadie Smith’s White Teeth, Dominic Head makes reference to two contrasting photographs of the author Zadie Smith as she appears in the first two published editions of her novel. In the first, wearing glasses and with gathered hair, she appears studious, academic almost – the paragon of the young, literary, serious writer. In the second, she exudes something approaching glamour – or, to use the argot of the age, ‘celebrity’ – with loose hair, the glasses removed and make-up revealed by the full-colour print. As Head points out, this is partly a question of marketing; however, perhaps it is also the result of an ambition to send out an image which verges on the ‘post-ethnic’.

Smith’s image presents a tabula rasa upon which the multifarious readers who make up the book’s target constituency may inscribe their own conceptions of identity. In short, she is projected as a cosmopolitan, chameleon-like ‘everywoman’. This ability to adopt different guises (however much it might have been imposed by publishers and agents) or to show different faces to the world is emblematic of a particular kind of cultural (as well as ethnic) hybridity. To extend the analogy further: hybridity, or a Janus-like ability to face in two different directions at once, to orientate oneself both outwards and inwards, lies at the heart of Smith’s novelistic response to the complex questions of cultural, communal, regional and/or national identity which seem very much of the zeitgeist at the beginning of this globalised century. Smith, born in Willesden green and, like her character Irie, of a Jamaican mother and an English father, has been specifically singled-out and then marketed as the literary voice and epitome of multicultural England. As such, she is an ideal writer to investigate for responses to the complex questions of imagining, representing and, more specifically in the terms of this essay, narrating and voicing this particular constituency.

If Smith can adopt different states and guises according to purpose, then so too, appropriately, does her narrative voice. Thus, it is through renegotiated forms of hybridity – of both the identities which the characters explore and encapsulate and of the very narrative technique through which they are represented – that Smith begins to forge a redemptive, celebratory representation of multicultural, multi-faced, yet somehow (just) coherent London.

Smith’s novelistic vision, then, is very much of its time. Complex and interweaving dramas of identity and national affiliation are being played out in Britain today within all of its constituent countries...
(in correspondingly different ways and with correspondingly different focuses), and, obviously, the migrant is a central figure in the cast. Smith, however, is attempting to voice a particular part of this mix: the third-generation, post-war immigrant into London for whom the concrete experience of migrancy and exile has become distant and the unbearable weight of roots is no longer felt so acutely. Smith’s novel focuses on the experience of moving from a state of transition (a context which Homi Bhabha has termed ‘liminal’4) into one of belonging. In this respect, White Teeth presents an intriguing and timely investigation of the questions of cultural identity which accrue around that hugely diverse group of people calling London, England, home. To return to the central thesis of this essay, Smith’s investigation comes in two forms: through the sharing of narrative, or more specifically, the participatory experience of narrative on the one hand, and the ways in which those narratives are voiced in the fictional discourse on the other. The novel comprises a vision of a shared, hybrid future (and past), and as such is aspirational, running as a gratifying counter-current to the prevailing cynicism which so often surrounds contemporary discussion of these issues. This cynicism is to be found on both sides of the debate: in the bemoaning of a perceived loss of heritage, shared values and national unity on one side, and in the open-palmed disavowal of any kind of coherence or the need for it – an appeal to a kind of nebulous post-nationalism or cosmopolitanism – on the other.

An important issue to address in the process of contextualising the novel (and one which features regularly in the media at the time of writing) is found in the murky no-man’s land which lies between the twin poles of multiculturalism and assimilation. Salman Rushdie indirectly associates the latter term with a new kind of imperialism which attempts to assimilate immigrants into ‘the last colony of the British Empire’ (after E.P. Thompson), as though the borders of British colonialism have now retreated to encase the shores of the island itself.5 Neither, however, is he sympathetic to tokenist, laissez-faire multiculturalism, which he saw as something of a ‘cop-out’ at the time of the term’s coming to the fore in the early 1980s.

… Now there’s a new catchword: ‘multiculturalism’. In our schools, this means little more than teaching the kids a few bongo rhythms, how to tie a sari and so forth. In the police training programme, it means telling cadets that black people are so ‘culturally different’ that they can’t help making trouble. Multiculturalism is the latest token gesture towards Britain’s blacks, and it ought to be exposed, like ‘integration’ and ‘racial harmony’, for the sham it is.4

In practical terms, Rushdie’s solution involves ‘facing up to and eradicating the prejudices’ within white society5; however, his particular fictional response to the issue is perhaps to be found in the post-ethnic, post-religious definitions of spaces as envisaged in the Delhi of Midnight’s Children. The imagined London Smith paints shimmering above the real city is in many ways redolent of Rushdie’s Delhi: secularised, non-denominational, gloriously multifacetted, to an extent ghettoised, but, somehow, crucially, coherent and definable. Whether or not the totems of multiculturalism are as glib and insubstantial as Rushdie and others (including a swathe of contemporary commentators) have suggested, Smith satirises them too. Throughout the pages of White Teeth, a sneer in the direction of ‘Happy Multicultural Land’ is easily discernible between the lines of the mannered narrative voice.

What is her prescription, then? The post-migrant identity is by its very nature a transitional one, characterised by continual reassessment and redefinition (i.e. it is liminal – the migrant exists at the borders of the nation, and is in a state of transition from one ‘place’, one culture, to the next). Accordingly, since World War II, writers from this constituency have been involved in an ongoing process of rewriting and redefining the nation body from within – of renegotiating the idea of nation. Writers such as Rushdie himself and, for example, Hanif Kureshi have been an integral part of this process, and Smith appears to borrow from both writers in yet another hybridisation: the meandering, polyphonic, cyclical style of Rushdie grafted onto the sharply observational urban realism of Kureshi. These writers have been gradually confronting, and then chipping away at, the obstacles to a meaningful hybridity – the same obstacles which prevent a moving out of the liminal state. The next step in this process is chronicled and illustrated in the course of White Teeth: moving into the cultural space previously dominated by ‘the natives’, and beginning to write from within instead of without. The literature which has evolved out of the experience of migrancy and liminality has ‘talked back’ to the centre and had a broadly centripetal effect, transforming (and renegotiating) the body of English Literature itself.

Domininc Head also cites Bhabha’s work in this connection on the relationship between ‘nation’ and

---

4 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge 2004), p. 148
4 Ibid., p. 137
5 Ibid., p. 138
The scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture, while the very act of the narrative performative interrogates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuous, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation.\(^6\)

The ‘minority’ will, Bhabha proposes, interrogate, or at the very least problematise, the narrative of the nation, supplementing, fragmenting and subsequently renegotiating it. In the process, the very conception of the nation space will be redefined. Migrant communities insinuate themselves into the national discourse, forcing recognition and acknowledgement, and then join in the subsequent re-articulation of this discourse. Part of this re-articulation can take place through the genre of narrative fiction itself, and it is here where the grounds for optimism can be located which, as was suggested at the beginning of this essay, run contrary to the prevailing forces of cynicism.

*White Teeth*, then, can be read as an exemplar of this process of renegotiation through narrative fiction and, further, as a castigation of conceptions of ethnicity as a ‘neutral gear’ for notions of identity. The book centres around three families who represent three ‘strands’ or groupings: the Chalfens (‘more English than the English’), liberal, middle-class, well-meaning – but remorselessly satirised. It subsequently emerges that they are third-generation Poles and, therefore, not ‘more English than the English’ (but in fact, it could be argued, as English as anybody else). Joyce Chalfen herself provides a handy and transparent distillation of this idea in her musings on horticultural practice, producing a ‘manifesto’ for the novel:

> The birds and the bees, the thick haze of pollen – these are all to be encouraged! […] In the garden, as in the social and political arena, change should be the only constant. Our parents and our parents’ petunias have learnt this lesson the hard way. The March of History is unsentimental, tramping over a generation and its annals with ruthless determination.\(^8\)

Then there are the Iqbals, who arrived in England from Bangladesh in 1973 and who were forced by bigotry and racism to flee from the East End to Willesden. The couple’s twin sons, Magid and Millat, both see their ‘roots’, and thus their identities, as lying elsewhere; they exist still in Bhabha’s liminal state. Millat looks first to America, and then to a form of Islamic fundamentalism, joining the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Nation, whose acronym, perhaps a little too neatly, provides extra satirising effect. Magid, on the other hand, travels to India before training as a ‘pukka English’ barrister, as their father Samad ruefully recounts:

\(^6\) Op. cit., Head pp. 110-1


\(^8\) Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (Penguin 2000), pp.309-10 [all subsequent references to this edition]
'There are no words. The one I send home comes out a pukka Englishman, white suited, silly wig lawyer. The one I keep here is fully paid-up green bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist. I sometimes wonder why I bother,’ said Samad bitterly, betraying the English inflections of twenty years in the country. ‘I really do. These days, it feels to me like you make a devil’s pact when you walk into this country. You hand over your passport at the check-in, you get stamped, you want to make a little money, get yourself started … but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay? Cold, wet, miserable; terrible food, dreadful newspapers – who would want to stay? In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated. Like an animal finally house-trained. Who would want to stay? But you have made a devil’s pact … it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognisable, you belong nowhere.’ p. 407

Samad’s attempts to shape and dictate the identities of his children are doomed to failure. So too, Smith implies, are those of any pedagogic discourse of nationhood.

The Iqbals also help to develop and sustain Smith’s undermining of ‘ethnic’ notions of received identity, as in the following episode where Alsana Smith’s undermining of ‘ethnic’ notions of received nationhood.

Alsana took out BALTIC-BRAIN, number 3 of their 24-set Reader’s Digest Encyclopedia, and read from the relevant section:

The vast majority of Bangladesh’s inhabitants are Bengalis, who are largely descended from Indo-Aryans who began to migrate into the country from the west thousands of years ago and who mixed within Bengal with indigenous groups of various racial stocks. Ethnic minorities include the Chakma and Mogh, Mongoloid peoples who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts District; the Santal, mainly descended from migrants from present-day India; and the Biharis, non-Bengali Muslims who migrated from India after the partition.

‘Oi, mister! Indo-Aryan … it looks like I am Western after all! Maybe I should listen to Tina Turner, wear the itsy-bitsy leather skirts. Pah. It just goes to show,’ said Alsana, revealing her English tongue, ‘you go back and back and back and it’s still easier to find the correct Hoover bag than to find one pure person, one pure faith, on the globe. Do you think anybody is English? Really English? It’s a fairy tale!’ p. 236

The last family (and corresponding theme) can be found in the Joneses, Archie and Clara and their ‘hybrid’ daughter Irie who, it could be argued, appears as Smith’s surrogate in the text. Irie initially turns back to Jamaica for her roots, but then concludes, triumphantly, that ‘roots don’t matter anymore … because they can’t because they mustn’t because they’re too long and they’re too torturous and they’re just buried too damn deep.’ (p. 527) It is here – in the digging up or casting off of roots – that Smith’s redemptive vision of the future beings to take form. Crucially, Irie ‘looks forward to it’; as suggested, the vision is a positive one. However, the vision is discernible even more clearly in the friendship between the two principle characters of the novel.

If the novel contains three narrative strands which help to encapsulate its themes, then these cohere around the book’s fulcrum: the relationship between Samad Iqbal and Archie Jones. It is here that Smith’s prescription for the future takes its final form. The two characters meet whilst serving in World War II, and, intriguingly, it is this cataclysmic event in British history which still so often acts as the pedagogic narrative of England’s identity (witness sections of the medias’ return to World War II imagery every time England play Germany at football, and the chanting of World War II songs and slogans by many of the crowd). There is an episode in the novel where Samad and Archie capture a French scientist, Dr. Perret, who is purported – appropriately enough in thematic terms – to have worked on Nazi sterilisation and eugenics programmes. Samad decides that Archie should execute the scientist there and then, and that this will make them heroes back in England. Archie duly disappears with the doctor, a shot is heard, and then Archie comes limping back with a bullet lodged in his thigh. The true course of events is not yet revealed to the reader, and the mystery installed here is directly connected to the novel’s central themes and comes to a head in its ending. This finale revolves around the launch of ‘FutureMouse’, a genetically modified mouse engineered to live for exactly seven years and to suffer predetermined genetic defects and diseases (principally, cancer) at set intervals. The mouse’s creator/inventor is the aforementioned Marcus Chalfen, and the unveiling of FutureMouse is to take place at the Perret Institute, whose eponymous benefactor is none other than the Dr. Perret who Archie was supposed to have executed in Africa. At this point, a further complication is introduced. Millat Iqbal, the Islamic fundamentalist, attempts to assassinate Dr. Perret in protest at the launch; and, yet again, Archie Jones intervenes to save the doctor, diving into the path of the bullet, taking another one in the thigh, and yet again ‘sparring’ Perret’s life. FutureMouse escapes from its cage
and runs away, taking with it, it would seem, all misguided notions of ethnic purity and the ability of humankind to breed the master race. 'You are all hybrids,' it seems to say, and this hybridity is something to be celebrated. As illustrated by Joyce Chalfen's exposition on cross-pollination and Alsan Iqbal's discovery of her ancestral roots, this theme is ubiquitous in the novel.

Aside from this direct development of central themes, there is another important interpretation of the chain of events that precipitates and then sustains Archie's and Samad's friendship; as Head has pointed out, it lies within the act of the shared and participatory telling of stories. At first, Samad feels betrayed and let down by Archie. Later, however, he experiences an epiphany:

And then, with a certain horrid glee, he [Samad] gets to the fundamental truth of it, the ana-negorisis: This incident alone will keep us two old boys going for the next forty years. It is the story to end all stories. It is the gift that keeps on giving. p. 533

In other words, he and Archie have taken part in a performative conception of narrative, a joint retelling of the past and, thus, a shared renegotiation of history. Herein lies the possible salvation of shared futures, as the characters are able to simultaneously become pedagogic objects (the centre of their own implausibly coincidence-laden story) and performative subjects (the tellers and re-tellers of that tale). They are voicing, and then re-voicing a shared narrative.

This is more than just a thematic concern, though; it is enacted through the narrative methodology of the novel itself. The narrative situation in general makes use of an omniscient (heterodiegetic) narrator using a third-person register. This narrator is anything but neutral and detached, though, and is adamant and fastidious about guiding our perceptions of its characters and bringing out the central themes of the text. There is still space, however, for the voices of the novel's many characters to chorus from either side of this central narrative discourse. As can be seen in the excerpt quoted above, these voices can find form in direct thought ('This incident alone will keep us two old boys going for the next forty years') and, of course, direct speech. However, most interestingly, Smith makes a great deal of use of free indirect discourse ('It is the story to end all stories. It is the gift that keeps on giving'). Dorrit Cohn defines free indirect discourse as follows (using the German term erlebte Rede, or 'narrated monologue'):

[Free indirect discourse is a] term which refers to an extension of the mixed mode of mimesis and the poet's or narrator's voice. In free indirect discourse, the voice of the character becomes embedded in the voice of the narrator; thus, the character's habit of speech is present, but direct imitation and quotation marks are not.

Some brief examples from the novel should suffice to illustrate the effect of this technique, and also to demonstrate how it connects to the theme of participatory narration:

The way Archie saw it, country people should die in the country and city people should die in the city. Only proper. In death as he was in life and all that. It made sense that Archie should die on this nasty urban street where he had ended up, living alone at the age of forty-seven, in a one-bedroom flat above a deserted chip shop. He wasn't the type to make elaborate plans – suicide notes and funeral instructions – before thought and speech. He wanted it to be perfectly quiet and still, like the inside of an empty confessional box or the moment in the brain before thought and speech. He wanted to do it before the shops opened. p. 4

The first sentence is pure diegetic narration, but the second and third ('Only proper…', 'In death…') begin to suggest the voice of the character, especially in the demotic 'and all that.' The fourth, fifth and sixth remain rooted in a register of diegetic narration – past tense, third-person – yet, crucially, are redolent of Archie's discourse and thus locate themselves within the sphere of his subjectivity. Note especially

---

9 Op. cit., Head p. 115
10 Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds: narrative modes for presenting consciousness in fiction (Princeton University Press 1998)
'a bit of silence, a bit of shush' (pure Archie-isms) before the return of the narrator’s voice to handle the more adroit line evoking the peace of the confessional or the silence of the brain ‘before thought and speech’. The last line, then, returns to Archie’s perspective. There is a blending of the external perspective of the heterodiegetic narrator with the more subjective one of the character himself.

Free indirect discourse also occurs in those parts of the narration concerned with Samad:

She began rifling through the catastrophe of her desk, and Samad leant back once more on his stool, taking what little satisfaction he could from the fact that her fingers, if he was not mistaken, appeared to be trembling. Had there been a moment, just then? He was fifty-seven – it was a good ten years since he’d had a moment – he was not at all sure he would recognise a moment if one came along. You old man, he told himself as he dabbed at his face with a handkerchief, you old fool. Leave now – leave before you drown in your own guilty excrecence (for he was sweating like a pig), leave before you make it worse. But was it possible? Was it possible that this past month – the month that he had been squeezing and spilling, praying and begging, making deals and thinking, thinking always about her – that she had been thinking of him? p. 158

Parts of this paragraph could be changed to direct thought (or internal monologue) simply by altering tense and pronouns: ‘Was there a moment, just then? I’m fifty-seven – it’s a good ten years since I’ve had a moment – I’m not at all sure I would recognise a moment if one came along.’ This is symptomatic of the proximity of the narrative discourse to Samad’s perspective, but the fact that the line beginning ‘I’m not at all sure...’ does not quite ring true with the wider tone of Archie’s voice confirms that a tantalising gap between the voices of character and narrator is still maintained, and the narrative voice is free to fluctuate between the two agencies. Accordingly, the next italicised line is pure direct thought: ‘You old man ... you old fool.’ The italics then disappear, indicating a shift back towards the narrator for the next, more externalised observation which requires a more ‘writerly’ register (‘leave before you drown in your own guilty excrecence’ [my emphasis]). Then, the direct thought returns, followed by more free indirect discourse (‘But was it possible ... that she had been thinking of him?’). Where more ‘writerly’, poetic articulation is required, Smith is free to intervene; where possible, though, she will allow a discourse centred on the character to remain in control.

To summarise: there are two strands to Smith’s fictional attempt to capture the multifariousness of contemporary London. The first comes about by virtue of the act of telling shared stories itself, and appeals to the power of these shared narratives (or a shared, participatory version of history), what Head calls ‘the narrative lifeblood of all postcolonial futures’, to be found in the shared histories of Archie and Samad. If national identity cannot be genetically engineered, then perhaps it can be culturally engineered in the space where pedagogic and performative conceptions of narratives intersect. Secondly, this theme is borne out, enacted, even, by the very narrative methodology of the novel. Its use of free indirect discourse engenders a situation whereby the narrator appears to be ceding control of the narrative discourse to character (whichever character happens to be the focus of the fiction at that point), almost in the manner in which a beam of light will be deflected from its course by the presence of a planet. For ‘light’ read narrative discourse; for ‘planet’, read character. And so the characters themselves, by sleight of hand, appear at times to be narrating themselves, and the border between mimesis and diegesis, between ‘showing’ and ‘telling’, becomes blurred. The narrative voice itself, like the characters it evokes for the reader, begins to move beyond liminality and into ‘belonging’.

Is Smith, then, implying the desirability of a form of postcolonial, postnational humanism (a cosmopolitanism), as many critics and reviewers appear to suggest? Rather, it could be argued that she acknowledges the fact that such a goal ignores the very human need to feel part of a shared community, operating on a relatively local level, with all its accompanying trappings of shared histories and stories and a definable, coherent and aspirational ongoing narrative. The crucial point is that this narrative must be performative, participatory, inclusive, shared – and Janus-faced, with one face looking backwards in acknowledgement, but the dominant one fixed forwards, facing determinedly in the direction of travel. As the epigraph to the novel from The Tempest proclaims, chiming with the defiant and celebratory escape of FutureMouse from the pedagogic confines of the Perret Institute: ‘What is past, is prologue.’

---

12 Op. cit., Head p. 115
References

Cohn, Dorrit, Transparent Minds: narrative modes for presenting consciousness in fiction (Princeton University Press 1998)

About the Author

Dr. Jeremy David Scott
I was awarded my PhD in 2005 and teach at the University of Kent in the areas of contemporary fiction, narratology, stylistics, discourse analysis, critical theory and general English literature. I also teach creative writing, and am a published fiction writer. My current research interests include fictional technique, literary representations of dialect, the relationship between narratives and identity, and fictional versions of Englishness. I have published on contemporary British and Irish fiction, on James Joyce. A new collection of short stories and a book on demotic narrative voices in contemporary fiction are both forthcoming in 2008.
THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES

EDITORS
Tom Nairn, RMIT University, Melbourne.
Mary Kalantzis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD
Patrick Baert, Cambridge University, UK.
David Christian, San Diego State University, California, USA.
Bill Cope, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.
Mick Dodson, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.
Hafedh Hallia, Institut Supérieur des Langues de Tunis, Tunisia.
Ted Honderich, University College, London.
Paul James, RMIT University, Australia.
Moneef Jazair, Institut Supérieur des Langues de Tunis, Tunisia.
Eleni Karantzola, University of the Aegean, Greece.
Bill Kent, Monash Centre, Prato, Italy.
Krishan Kumar, University of Virginia, USA.
Ayat Labadi, Institut Supérieur des Langues de Tunis, Tunisia.
Greg Levine, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.
Fethi Mansouri, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.
Juliet Mitchell, Cambridge University, UK.
Nikos Papastergiadis, University of Melbourne, Australia.
Robert Pascoe, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.
Scott Schaffer, Millersville University, USA.
Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Stanford University, USA.
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Columbia University, USA.
Giorgos Tsiakalos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.
Siva Vaidhyanathan, New York University, USA.
Hortensia Beatriz Vera Lopez, University of Nottingham, UK.
Chris Zigras, RMIT University, Australia.

Please visit the Journal website at http://www.Humanities-Journal.com for further information:
- ABOUT the Journal including Scope and Concerns, Editors, Advisory Board, Associate Editors and Journal Profile
- FOR AUTHORS including Publishing Policy, Submission Guidelines, Peer Review Process and Publishing Agreement

SUBSCRIPTIONS
The Journal offers individual and institutional subscriptions. For further information please visit http://ijh.cgpublisher.com/subscriptions.html. Inquiries can be directed to subscriptions@commongroundpublishing.com

INQUIRIES
Email: cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com