A Self Multiplied: Culture and Identity in Relation to Place in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract:

This essay examines questions pertaining to transculturality, hybridity, and imaginary homelands, as shown in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children.* Both novels deal with second generation families that have been, or are currently, processing and adapting to their respective postcolonial realities - the case for Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* - or immigrant and second generation families living in London and struggling in the relationship with their hybrid identity markers - such as in the story-line for Smith's *White Teeth*. Multiple characters in both Smith and Rushdie's novels explicitly face coming to terms with these multiple "identity markers" in relation to where they are in the present moment and from whence they and their families have come. Using Smith and Rushdie's novels as a foundation upon which to consider these issues, this essay explores the realities of hybrid identity, as well as an exploration of the following questions: how do cultural multiplicity and the after-effects of colonization reverberate in families from immediate and future generations? How do questions of identity associated with place adapt and change depending on where one is living? What is considered "home" for an immigrant family living away from their tangible - or not - ancestral place of origin? What becomes of transgenerational memory? This essay explores these questions through the chosen theory and literature.

Keywords: postcolonial literatures, Zadie Smith, Salman Rushdie, imaginary homelands, hybridity, collective memory, identity, intergenerational familial relations, transculturality, London, India.

"Once . . . places had names, it was, strangely enough, easier to find your way to them,"
Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*

"The immigrant must invent the ground beneath his feet,"
Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

In her book *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within,* Natalie Goldberg writes of the absolute importance and necessity of a writer's relationship to his or her home: "It is very important to go home if you want your work to be whole. . . .

[Y]ou must claim where you come from and look deep into it. Come to honour and embrace it, or at the least, accept it" (182). How is it so that, according to Goldberg, a writer's relationship with his or her place of "origin," for lack of a better expression, should contain such weight and importance to a writer? Why is it that *place* in relation to *person* creates a certain kind of "wholeness" that is necessary in order to create a complete work? Is this *really* an indispensable part of creating? On this potentially elusive idea of "home" and the homeplace as indispensable to producing work, writer and essayist Salman Rushdie explores these ideas and others in his collection of essays entitled *Imaginary Homelands*. The essay that shares the title of the collection, "Imaginary Homelands," is written in a retrospective light at the moment when Rushdie first realized that he wanted to "reclaim" his history upon a revisiting of his childhood home in Bombay. Rushdie writes,

> Bombay is a city built by foreigners upon reclaimed land; I, who had been away so long that I almost qualified for the title, was gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim. It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge...that our own physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely what was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homeland, Indias of the mind. (10)

It is from this desire to “recall as much of the Bombay of the 1950s and 1960s as [he] could” (10) that fuelled the conception of what eventually became the novel *Midnight’s Children*, a work that has become honored to the highest literary degree. However, apart from the critical acclaim and plethora of recognition, the novel is considered to have done much more on the social and cultural plane than simply meeting the aesthetic standards on which literary prizes are won; the novel somehow managed to describe a generation and a period of time that had been needing to be written into a book (11). From this reasoning and idea, how can an “exile or emigrant or expatriat[e]” begin again (11)? What would this look like and how would the following generation relate to their parents’ history as being vastly different from their own identity in another country? A reverberated echo that permeates Jewish-Canadian writer Mordecai Richler’s work sounds faintly throughout the novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz;* Duddy’s mantric repeating of “[a] man without land is nobody” (49), as identity-defining goes beyond the merely physical need of land upon which one can build one’s home; it is a psychological need to recognize oneself .

With these questions of “home,” and the reality that three-quarters or more of the world population have been colonized or have experienced colonialism, in some way or another, I was propelled to examine what critics and writers alike have written on the issue (Ashcroft 1). In this essay, I will use Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* as bases upon which to relate and interweave cultural studies issues and theories on overriding themes of transculturality and hybridity, namely concerning the relationship between self and place. The first section of this essay will be theory-based. I will synthesize articles and discussions that have been written on the cultural studies angle that can be used to better understand issues that are present in Smith and Rushdie's works, not to mention to provide a basis for which to consider works that are deemed transcultural. The second section of this essay, I will primarily consider the novels in the context which I have mentioned above, while building on existing theories with my own ideas and what I found to be overarching and pertinent ideas in the book.

Before bringing in my chosen theory, it is necessary that I state a caveat from the top of this work: debates and questions of identity, multiculturality, transculturality, and hybridity assume an existence of a "whole" state of identity based on place and ethnicity. This essay does not assume a reality of "pure" states of ethnicity as existing at all in any form. I do, however, find it important to talk about non-theorized and real-life issues stemming from immigration and multicultural or multiethnic hereditary makeup. By means of introduction to such discussion and the difficulty to discuss such topics, I will use Wolfgang Welsch's "Transculturality—The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today" to serve as an educational and clarifying tool as to what it means to write and debate about issues of culture. First of all, identity is created and is not innate; therefore, if we are to consider questions of identity and culture we could, theoretically, argue that we are fluid beings and able to begin anew, so to speak, many times over. This is not, of course, the case in the lives of real people living their lives in this now very globalized world of intersections and cross-overs that occur on a day-to-day basis.

In his essay, Welsch uses the term "transculturality" as a means to have a more inclusive name to replace the terms "interculturality" and "multiculturality." On this same matter, and in his collection of essays in *Imaginary Homelands* entitled "The New

Empire Within Britain," Salman Rushdie writes, "[m]ulticulturalism 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" (137). Welsch also finds that these terms do not suffice, and, therefore, the critic created "transculturality" as a term to bridge the gap between past terms that promoted an eventuality of ghettoization and stereotypes that stem from claiming the existence of a single and uniform "ethnic group," a concept that is not only outdated but plain incorrect in assessing today's multifaceted collective society. As there exists no real homogeneity, Welsch's term "transculturality" reconfigures and revolutionizes the ways that "the traditional concept of culture proves to be factually inadequate: it cannot cope with the inner complexity of modern cultures." Despite this term, there nonetheless remain holes in his argument, namely, the idea that one cannot simply begin anew and erase collective and individual memories of any given person.

Nestor Garcia Canclini echoes a similar sentiment but carries it further in the essay "Hybrid Cultures in Globalized Times." The critic writes of the term "hybridity" as being a "sociocultural [process] in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices" (114). The critic believes that the term is an overused one and, like Welsch, that it assumes "the pretense of establishing 'pure' or 'authentic' identities [while] in addition, [demonstrating] the risk of delimiting local, self-contained identities or those that attempt to assert themselves as radically opposed to national society or globalization" (116). Canclini explores the idea of doubling and writes of critic Cornejo Polar's work and use of the term "schizophrenia" to describe some processes of hybridization:

> On some occasions . . . one transfers elements from one discourse to another metonymically or metaphorically. In other cases, the subject accepts being decentered from his or her own history and takes on different "incompatible and contradictory 'roles' 'in a nondialectical way': the there and the here, which are also the yesterday and the today, reinforce the subject's enunciative competence and can concoct narratives and –even if you like, exaggerating somewhat—schizophrenically. (117)

These issues of hybridization and schizophrenia are precisely where I will eventually lead this essay, when I begin to talk of Rushdie and Smith's novels.

On the topic of Rushdie and his novel, in his essay entitled "Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: National Narrative as a Liminal Voice," critic Mark Mossman explains that the works of postcolonial writers are oftentimes diminished as not being exemplum of a single voice, that of the work of the novel itself, for instance, but instead as allegorical for a collective voice that the work is "supposedly" putting forth. This is, of course, not the case for Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as the novel is, in fact, written allegorically. Mossman synthesizes ideas by other critics, such as Homi Bhabha, Aijay Ahmad, and controversial postcolonialist critic Fredric Jameson, to name a few. Mossman then engages with certain aspects of Jameson's work, notably and most importantly the latter's controversial statement regarding his division between "First World Literature" and "Third World Literature", the latter in which he classifies Rushdie's work.

In Rufus Cook's article "Place and Displacement in Salman Rushdie's Work," the critic writes of *Midnight's Children* and Rushdie's novel in general, not as being part of what Jameson called "Third World Literature," but instead being exemplum and a voice for all postcolonial countries' writing of itself. Cook continues to write that Rushdie is the ideal "persuasive spokesmen" on the matter of transcultural writings, if I may synthesize terms here, this one from Welsch (23). Because of his position as being not only a successful writer but also a widespread and critically acclaimed author, Cook writes that Rushdie finds "new ways of being human" in his works, that come along with issues of hybridity and "cultural displacement," as the critic calls it (23). Rushdie has said, Cook writes, that "the immigrant or expatriate is in a better position than the rest of us to appreciate the pluralistic, contradictory nature of contemporary experience: to accept that 'reality is an artefact'"(23). Cook cites an explicit example from the novel *Midnight's Children* to underline his previous statement:

> In *Midnight's Children* [the protagonist] Saleem Sinai's displacement from his "Bombay roots" results in a "haze of unreality," in his being completely "emptied of history" and plunged, like India itself, into a state of moral amnesia. "Nothing was real; nothing certain,"Saleem observes of the "diseased reality" of his Pakistani years. (24)

This displacement and removal from one's roots, as explained above through the character of Saleem, is an idea that Cook continues to pursue, as Rushdie's narrator describes the desire to see his past not as being a "diseased reality" but instead as reborn or, as the author writes, new again, as well as to "[r]estore the past to [himself], not I the faded greys of old family album snapshots, but whole, in CinemaScope and glorious Techniocolor" (qtd in Cook 25). It is this desire of the "expatriate writer" to "reclaim . . . a lost city" that is a main motivation for writing in the first place" (qtd in Cook 25). Again in reference to *Midnight's Children*, Cook writes, "Saleem Sinai is aware that, "inside himself," he is "anything but a whole, anything but homogenous; all kinds of everywhichthing are jumbled up inside him, and he is one person one minute and another the next" (283).

Besides these struggles with self and identity, language is also a dividing and identity-laden factor, and a reality that immigrants must face in their transition into a new environment. In terms of criticism that I've chosen about Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, in her essay, "'We are a divided people, aren't we?' The politics of multicultural and multitudinous languages present and spoken and the dialect-crossing throughout Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*," critic Jarica Linn Watts focusses on language present in Smith's *White Teeth* and in doing so highlights "an impressive linguistic repertoire" that paints a "compelling portrait of modern London" while underlining the importance of "inter-racial relationships and multiculturalism" presented in the novel (852). Watts, and other critics that the latter cites, supports Smith's inclusive and "optimistic vision of racial easiness," although this view is considered to be reductive, as critic Molly Thompson points out in her essay "Happy Multicultural Land?" wherein the latter writes that multiculturalism, or "transculturality" and "the possibility of feeling at home" is, ultimately, "unlikely" (852). Watts underlines the challenges faced by characters with insecurities in their discourse: "[t]hat both Samad and Abdul-Mickey – indeed, all of the characters within this novel – harbour a sense of linguistic anxiety is not surprising as they each recognise the ways that language use signals class and ethnic status" (868). Watts also highlights the inability to move out of societal unease due to lingual "give-away" of a non-native English speaker:

> implications which suggest that the borrowed tongue of the immigrant will continually be heard as imperfect to native English speakers, implications that tell us that someone without teeth is really someone without 'roots' – and that someone without roots is necessarily uncertain and insecure about their position in society, particularly when their external environment continues to privilege white Western culture over the coloured Orient. (869)

On language, Rushdie himself has commented on the use of English by a non native speaker, writing that the latter would do so "in spite of [his] ambiguity towards it . . . To conquer English may be to complete the process of making [himself] free" *(Imaginary Homelands*, 17).

In the article "Affirming Complexity*: White Teeth* and Cosmopolitanism," critic Katina Rogers writes of the city of London being used in the novel as being "a backdrop that Smith constructs[:] a narrative that continually and unabashedly comments on its own tendencies, shortcomings, and idiosyncrasies" (46). Rogers postulates that in *White Teeth*, Smith produces a "convincing critique of cosmopolitanism and other similar post-colonial perspectives on hybridity" (46). Rogers begins her article by describing "cosmopolitanism" as defined by critics and scholars alike, but specifically relies on the term suggesting "a sloughing off of history and cultural identity in order to ensure harmony and guard human rights" that can either have positive ramifications in the conflict-rifled globalized reality, but does not, Rogers argues, do less to promote patriotism (46). Nevertheless, as stated above by Welsch, concerning the terms "interculturality" and "multiculturality", "cosmopolitanism" as a term has a similar problem in that, according to Rogers and other critics she cites, the term presupposes an

> increas[e] in cultural hegemony [that it] sets out to eliminate [because] rather than [a] re-valor[ization] [of what] has been marginalized, cosmopolitanism has a tendency to merely commodify the local while continuing to observe through a Western lens, [as] the understanding of cosmopolitanism is rooted in and depends on a particular cultural perspective, which has been created by national and cultural understanding. (48)

What, then, can be done on the matter? Is this an issue and reality that is only lessened with the passing of time, with generations to come, and as the globalized world becomes more and more amalgamated, so that there will be no basis upon which one could qualify "them" differing from "us"? Writers have written and continue to write on this duality and of the struggle to have a consistent sense of self and identity.

Now that I've presented some theories that I found to be pertinent and indispensable in my consideration of these texts, I will now bring in concrete and explicit examples from Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Smith's *White Teeth* for my analysis of the works in the context of the theory. Considering the notion and feeling of belonging, what does it really mean to "be at home" and to "belong" in general? This is a question that has been building from the onset of this essay and recapitulated by theorists that I have included, and by Rushdie himself, the latter writing of the desire to either “restore the past” or to start anew in a new city and place (*Imaginary Homelands* 10).

Though both Smith and Rushdie have lived and experienced different cultural realities, if I may, Smith having grown up as half Jamaican and half English in North London and Rushdie having emigrated from India to North London as an adult, both writers are writing from the same vantage point: from their respective desks overlooking North London while being considered, for different reasons, as being culturally “other”. In the introductory pages of his essay collection *Imaginary Homelands,* Rushdie writes, “[w]riting my book in North London, looking out through my window on to a city scene totally unlike the ones I was imagining on to paper, I was constantly plagued by this problem [of imaginary homelands and Indias of the mind]” (10). Rushdie continues and writes, “what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: “‘my’ India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions” (10). Smith’s *White Teeth* does not face the same predicament per se, as the novel is about transgenerational issues of characters—like the author herself—who had been born into the country as a second generation immigrant. Despite these key differences between the authors, in terms of from what point looking out onto North London they differ, both (potentially) deal with the same problem of creating identity in a world where classifying people who are considered to be the borderline derogatory term “ethnic” in relation to the overriding norm of the place in question is, unfortunately, a reality. How do these two authors, in particular, write of experiences they have lived and felt in their works? Without overstepping and attempting to guess at any sort of authorial intent, it is striking, I have found, to see how authors and their characters face hybridity, multiculturalism, or transculturality - whichever name suits the elephant-in-the-room-*sans-nom*.

Rushdie's characters struggle with identity qualms of their own. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie writes of his protagonist's struggle as having been born in the author's own unease over how to write about his mother country:

> I made my narrator, Saleem, suspect in his narration; his mistakes are of the fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary. It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. (*Imaginary Homelands* 10-11)

Midnight's Children is a novel that values, and is based upon, the appreciation and importance of one's past and one's future. The novel is written allegorically and set to show manifestations of what the independence of India could do to a people. The novel was therefore named after the children born at the stroke of midnight at the moment of the country's independence. With this base, Rushdie writes of the ramifications that, although heavily shrouded in elements of magical realism throughout, becomes the country for the new generation of children. These children born at the stroke of midnight have magical powers that enable them, through Saleem's mediation, to communicate between themselves. This idea in general calls to mind theory that I have cited above, notably questions of place, rootedness, and "home": "To understand just one life," the unborn Saleem is told, "you have to swallow the world," and the idea that we all contain fragments of our country and past is depicted throughout the novel in various ways (121).

Rushdie's example of place is literally tied to the land. Being at one with India's independence and "birth," so to speak, Saleem is so connected to his land that, when his family move to Pakistan for a few years, he suddenly is not able to "hear" the other children of midnight, nor does he have memories of his name and his experiences before the move; all memories become hazy when he is removed from India. When Saleem begins to remember himself, after a complicated spiritual ordeal and a coming-around-to-self, Saleem asks himself:

> Why, alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history? . . . Tonight, as I recall my rage, I remain perfectly calm . . . Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. . . . Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each "I," every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world. . . . I realized that I had begun, once again, to feel. (440-441)

This strong and primordial connection, as described above, to the land and to one's identity and memory is fascinating. The allegorical idea that one's essence is completely removed, to the point of forgetting one's name and memories, once one leaves one's country of origin, is conflicting, for the following reasons; however, before I begin this interjection of a critic's work into my reading of the novel *Midnight's Children,* I want to underline that I do understand the novel is written as an allegory, as previously mentioned. However, I think it interesting to consider the text in light of what my chosen theorists have said on the matter, all the while remembering that the novel is not to be read and considered on a “real-life” basis, a basis upon which I would not hesitate to consider Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. For instance, I can read the novel as an allegory and not over-theorize on the fact that, if Saleem represents India, what could his impotency have to do with my overall analysis of place and person? I would not be overstepping, but instead be manipulating the text in order to benefit my own personal analysis of the work aligned with my views. If we are to consider Cook's comments about Rushdie being able to find “new ways to be human” (23), how does Saleem's episode living in Pakistan undermine the critic's comment? It is true that reality is constructed, as is identity, but I find Cook's comment does not hold water in this particular circumstance given that the character Saleem was so connected to his country that he was completely erased and diminished while not being within the country's boundaries. Rushdie himself writes, again in “Imaginary Homelands,” that the overarching and all-encompassing existential question that an Indian writer faces is the following: “How are we to live in the world?. . . What does it mean to be ‘Indian’ outside India [and] [w]hat are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us?” (18). Though I see what Cook is insinuating, I find that Saleem's journey, at least during this section of the novel, undermines the adaptability that Cook and Rushdie both consider to be present in the latter's work. Rushdie says this adaptability is an advantage for the Indian writers, who have “access to a second tradition quite apart from their own racial history. . . and it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents. My own . . . include Gogol, Cervantes, Kafka, Melville, Machado de Assis; a polyglot family tree . . .” (*Imaginary Homelands* 20-21). It is this idea of creating the self and having access or creating a “second tradition” that is reality for the characters. This discussion begs the following question: are we better off without history? To be wiped and cleared of it if we are to start over somewhere new?

The idea of a “double” self is also echoed in Zadie Smith’s work and life. Smith has had similar experiences in her life in London, and, as a first-generation Londoner, the writer explains that the ideas in *White Teeth* dealing with “unrootedness” are born from second-generation immigrants who sometimes find it equally difficult to integrate in the first place. In Kathleen O’Grady’s “*White Teeth*: A Conversation with Author Zadie Smith,” Smith cites experiences in her youth as being formative in how she came to conceive *White Teeth* in her early twenties:

> If you take the whole of human history as a body or as a person, then there are events within that which are like trauma, like childhood traumas. The Second World War is a trauma like being abused as a child, being slapped over the head with a brick, or whatever. It's a trauma, and it's something that takes generations to get over. And as you know any abuse in the family can be passed down again and again and again. My mother used to work in social work and she definitely saw that process of passing on and how desperate and depressing that is when families pass on their traumas from one generation to the next. (O’Grady 105-106)

Smith goes on to say that she does not know any peer writers of hers who, at the time, had written a book without any mention of the Holocaust, an experience that had been passed down and collectively felt *in utero*, if I may. She goes on to say “[t]hat whole kind of 60s, 70s, liberation ethic that will be released by knowing your roots, that you will discover yourself . . . [is] a crock basically, and it’s partly true, but your roots come with baggage” (106). Smith continues and explains the difference between white Western families compared to families in the eastern part of the world: “[White children] always think of themselves as separate individuals and they get very far that way. . . . But for people from the East every person is their family. . . . That between one void and the other people kind of construct something that makes sense to them” (106, 107). The novel as a whole depicts this beautifully, especially the cultural divide between second-generation children of immigrants, their parents, and overall issues of transgenerational strife, namely, how the second generation chooses who to be, given that they “straddle” cultures.

I found that in my reading of the novel, the work did not force the reader to decide on what has meaning and what does not - instead it seems to flow as would conversation with others in “real life” would; we pick and choose what is important and of essence for ourselves. Smith writes poignantly on complicated issues of hybridity, as demonstrated in Iqbal and Alsana’s twin sons, Magid and Millat. The first generation immigrants seem to prefer assimilating with the English culture in London, where the novel takes place, however the younger generation depicted in the novel shy away from assimilating like their parents had, as shown in the following example in an example between parents and son: “Samad growled, ‘[Magid], [w]hy are you always trying to be somebody you are not? . . . A few months earlier, on Magid’s ninth birthday, a group of very nice-looking white boys with meticulous manners had turned up on the doorstep and asked for Mark Smith. ‘Mark? No Mark here,’ Alsana had said . . . ‘Only the family Iqbal in here]’” (Smith 126). Upon discovering that her son had changed his name outside of his home, Alsana yells, "'I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME LIKE MAGID MAHFOOZ MURSHED MUBTASIM IQBAL . . . AND YOU WANT TO BE CALLED MARK SMITH!'"(126). After this tirade, Madid thinks angrily to himself:

> But this was just a symptom of a far deeper malaise. Magid really wanted to be *in some other family*. He wanted to own cats and not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; . . .he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed's car . . . (126)

This is just one example of the novel's pages that are riddled with generational strife.

The twin brothers Magid and Millat are interesting as a literary device in that they exemplify a response to the question "what if"? The boys are meant to be mirror images of the other in terms of being connected. Magid's interest in rejecting his cultural heritage saddens and hurts his father to the point that the latter sends his son off to Bangladesh, where he hopes his son would be raised in a more traditional manner that would not have been possible had he remained in England. Magid ends up becoming the opposite of what his father wanted him to become, and Millat, who remained in England, becomes a fundamentalist; this situation is expressed in the following passage:

> 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. . . . 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 . . . but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay? Cold, wet,

> miserable; terrible food. . .who would want to stay? In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. . . . But you have made a devil's pact…it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere. (Smith 336)

Millat, on the other hand, seems to handle his duality well, as "in his mind he was as much [in Bengal] as he was in [Willesden]. He did not require a passport to live in two places at once, he needed no visa to live his brother's life and his own (he was a twin, after all)" (183).

This example and idea of "twins" is present in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as well, as shown in the character of Shiva. Shiva is not exactly Saleem's twin, but the characters are nevertheless connected from the beginning of the novel, as they had been born the same night and switched at birth, an incident that enables Saleem to live a lavish life with a rich family and for Shiva to be a poor, homeless child. This dichotomy is similar to *White Teeth* in that the two boys mirror one another and are connected, all to demonstrate that one is pulled between what is and what could have been, hence the mention of schizophrenia: a being pulled between two selves, essentially, and two parts of a whole, for some. This notion of "twinning" and a doubling of characters demonstrates hybridity and issues of duality in identity. These issues accomplish a visualization process of reconciliation and restorative elements that exemplify the experience of an identity straddled between two identities, cultures, and above all, one's identity and conception of self, given the environment in question.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat and underline the fact that *White Teeth* ends openly and without any large pronouncements other than the feeling of having read about characters who very well could live in one’s own neighbourhood. Smith herself claimed that she was unable to wrap up the novel as she had wanted because she was overwhelmed by the size of her varied content: “I couldn't resolve a lot of the issues that the book brought up. In the end I kind of threw up my hands and so do all of the characters really” (O’Grady 107). Rushdie echoes a similar feeling in *Imaginary Homelands* in responding to his own existential question of “How are we to live in this world?” by writing “I do not propose to offer, prescriptively, any answers to these questions; only to state that these are some issues with which each of us will have to come to terms” (18). This statement mirrors my own thoughts on the matter. I have not broken any new ground in this work, although I had not anticipated that I would, or could. True, I was able to read and learn of writers like Rushdie and Smith who not only *live* “transcultural” existences but also *write* of them, however implicitly or explicitly in their texts. Like them, I have not come to any conclusions - though I have a hunch there are none to be had, nothing “prescriptive,” anyway. The idea was to think about one’s place in the world and how people interact with one another. I suppose we have to live fluidly and hesitate to define ourselves, lest we become reduced merely to the words that define us, or that we let ourselves be defined by, and then, perhaps, eventually acting out in accordance to said defining words. How *are* we to live in this world? To return to writer Natalie Goldberg's advice to writers, which I mentioned in my introduction, one must “claim where you come from and look deep into it . . . [i]t is very important to go home if you want your work to be whole” (182). I argue that Rushdie and Smith, looking out their respective windows in North London, demonstrate that "home" is malleable and where one chooses to hang one's multiple hats.

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