

A Mythological Thread of Exploring Origin, Self and Culture in the Novels of Zadie Smith.

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Abstract

This research paper explores the myths of origin,culture, and self in the novels *White Teeth*(2000)*On Beauty*(2005),and *Swing Time*(2016).Her intricate novels delve deep into how inherited myths and self created myths,contour individual and group identities.She probes how culture and personal mythology molds the protagonist's life.This paper posits about myths, displaying how they evolve amid strife in a multicultural world.Origin myths in her works are often fluid and reinterpreted through the lens of diasporas, immigration, and shifts between generations.Cultural myths are explored through the lens of globalization,where the stories of the past give way to to fragmented and personalized narratives.Personal myths are tightly connected to the search for individuality and self-realization, as characters wrestle with the stories they inherit and those they wish to create for themselves.Her fiction is thus a critique of myth in which individual and communities construct and deconstruct the stories that define them.

Keywords:-Myths,Diaspora,Individuality,Fragmentation and Multicultural world .

Introduction

Zadie Smith,A celebrated contemporary writer,has received critical acclaim for her subtle approach to themes of identity, culture and society.Her novels often delve,into the myths that mirror various aspects of human life. These myths are not falsehoods, but stories and beliefs which form us as individuals and society.This paper looks at how her novels interrogate and re-create those myths, concentrating on how the representation of certain myths rendered to destabilize dominant structures but are not restricted to question marks about identity and issues surrounding cultural hybridity as seen in *White Teeth*,*On Beauty* and *Swing Time* that uncover hidden myths under their reinterpretation. The paper also reveals how such myths intersect with ideas of race and migration, as well as cultural hybridity; a richly layered narrative on the protean capacity of story-telling.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative textual analysis method to select novels *White Teeth*, *On Beauty* and *Swing Time*.The study focuses on close reading with postcolonial and cultural studies theory, to show how her novels engage and challenge traditional mythologies. The analysis involves the identification and interpretation of myths present in these texts.Secondary sources also provided contexts related to myth and literature.

Literature Review

Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell suggest that myth is an enduring feature exerts enormous influence over narrative structures as well as cultural identities. In postcolonial literature myths intersect with many themes like hybridity, displacement and resistance. John Mullan and Tracey Walters have observed Smith's utilization of historical myths as well as cultural in addition to her portrayal associated with typically the experience involving immigrants along utilizing inter generational conflicts. *White Teeth* is often analyzed for its reinterpretation of origin myths and its commentary on the legacies of colonialism. *On Beauty* uses classical and artistic myths to dramatize the tensions between a family. *Swing Time* is rich in personal and cultural myths.

Results and Findings

Smith's novels delved into three prominent types of myths origin myths, cultural myths, and personal myths. In *White Teeth*, Smith deconstructs origin myths apart at the seams through the intertwined lives of families immigrating to London. The narrative challenged the notion of untarnished origins by portraying hybrid identities and histories molded by colonialism's lingering effects. The Iqbal family's journey from Bangladesh to London illustrates how myths of national and familial origins are reinterpreted in a diasporic context. As Samad Iqbal reflects, "What is the point of roots if you can't take them with you?" This statement underscored the tension between ancestry narratives and identity's fluidity in our globalized world. Archie Jones served as a lens to examine the myth of the "Everyman," highlighting how such archetypes are complicated by culture and circumstance. His seemingly random decisions, such as flipping a coin to make life choices, symbolize the unpredictability of personal myths in shaping one's destiny.

On Beauty, draws on classical and artistic myths to critically examine societal conventions and hierarchies of power. Howard Belsey's rejection of traditional values and declaration that "art should disturb, not comfort" reflects a broader interrogation of academic and aesthetic ideals. Kiki Belsey challenges the myth of the idealized woman through her unapologetic embrace of her body and identity. And her line, "I am not a symbol; I am an individual," highlights the restrictions of reductive myths in capturing the intricacies of human experience. But all throughout, there is a depth of feeling and sensitivity. Societal expectations aside, personal relationships show us how obviously human everyone really is.

Swing Time examines personal and cultural myths through the prism of dance and friendship. The protagonist's obsession with the myths of black performance art how it's mythologized, and how it's shared a larger question about cultural appropriation and authenticity. There's "something in the rhythm of a dance that tells the truth of a people, Smith writes and myths can empower or restrict people in equal measure. But this relationship between the unnamed narrator and her friend, Tracey becomes a microcosm of greater forces at play, showing the friction between individual ambition and collective legacy. Tracey's obsession with fame and the narrator's quest for belonging highlight the conflicting narratives that people internalize about themselves, and the myths they create, to negotiate their identities.

Origin Myths

"History has to be written anew, every day, to make sense. It has to be mythologized." (*White Teeth*)

This quotation discusses the idea that history, especially the history of origins is constantly reshaped and retold to offer meaning. The mythologizing of history implies that the reality of our origins is influenced by the collective imagination of people who narrate the stories rather as being static or fixed. In the context of the novel, it depicts the characters' attempts to reconcile their family histories in a way that fits nearly into the paradoxes of their respective cultures and histories.

*"The myth of origins, like the myth of destiny,
Belongs to a more ancient time." - On Beauty*

The above quote outlines the way origin myths were once key to self understanding, but are now viewed as relics of the past. Smith contends that our sense of identity has grown more fluid and detached from the rigid, mythic frames that traditionally defined who we were and where we came from. In *On Beauty*, characters confront with their individual and cultural origins, which are both vital and stultifying.

Cultural Myths

"There are no more myths. There are only stories." - White Teeth.

This line statement embodies a postmodern skepticism with regard to the efficacy of major cultural myths used to unite communities or nations. In a contemporary context, Smith claims cultural myths have given way to fragmented, individualized stories. The cultural myths that formerly defined identity are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in a globalized, multicultural society where individual experiences trump collective stories.

*"In our culture, you can always start over. You can begin anew at,
Any moment. It's the myth of the reinvention of the self." - Swing Time.*

This quote addresses a common contemporary cultural myth: the idea that people can continually reinvent themselves. It reflects the belief, especially prevalent in Western society, that one's past is mutable and that individuals have the power to define their future. The novel critiques this myth through the character's journey, as it highlights how reinvention can often be an illusion, shaped by privilege and opportunity.

Personal Myths

*"We are all born in the middle of things, not at the beginning,
and often. The beginning doesn't seem to matter." - Swing Time.*

This line highlights the complexities of personal myths. People are influenced by existing stories, whether familial, cultural, or societal, rather than starting from the scratch. The "beginning" is often unknown and yet individuals must navigate their lives in the middle of an ongoing narrative, continually constructing and reconstructing their myths. This pertains to the novel's theme of identity, legacy and self-discovery.

"Each of us is a kind of ghost. The family ghosts are the most familiar, their stories are the ones we grow up with, and their histories are the ones that will probably live the longest" - On Beauty

The quote combats the theme of personal mythologies, particularly those developed via familial history and inheritance. The "family ghosts" are the persistent myths and histories that individuals inherit, and they often serve as the core of how we perceive ourselves. The personal myth here is about the formation of identities, created via narratives passed down through generations, even if those myths are fragmented or contradictory.

Conclusion

By deconstructing traditional notions, she illustrates their bounds and biases, most significantly in terms of race, gender, and class. In *White Teeth*, the reinvention of origin myths prompts a reconsideration of colonial past and their impact on modern identities. Classical myths emphasize the

stories enduring relevance while also challenging their applicability to varied, multicultural situations. *Swing Time's* exploration of performance and identity reveals how myths can be both inspiring and divisive. By emphasizing the experiences of oppressed characters, Smith reclaims and redefines myths, opening up new avenues for representation and empowerment. Thus underscores the role of myth in understanding cultural personal identities, underlining her contribution to the ongoing discourse on race, migration and belonging in a globalized world.

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