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## FATHERS AND SONS IN MODERN BRITISH, IRISH, AND POSTCOLONIAL FICTION

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FATHERS AND SONS IN MODERN BRITISH, IRISH, AND  
POSTCOLONIAL FICTION

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
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Lexington, Kentucky  
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2019

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### FATHERS AND SONS IN MODERN BRITISH, IRISH, AND POSTCOLONIAL FICTION

In this dissertation, I examine the portrayal of filial relationships in the fiction of James Joyce, Hanif Kureishi, and Zadie Smith. I assert that each of these authors, albeit in different ways, uses the archetypal father and son relationship to interrogate the formation of national identity and the concept of national belonging in modern, anticolonial or postcolonial cultures, including Ireland at the dawn of the twentieth century and Britain in the late twentieth century. Chapter one focuses on Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922). I argue that rather than solely bonding in a symbolic father and son relationship, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom also develop a companionable friendship and their differing qualities merge to uncover a modern voice with which an artist may represent Ireland. In chapter two, I analyze Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and argue that the protagonist's relationship with his father illustrates the benefits of commodifying one's identity in postcolonial Britain. Chapter 3 examines Zadie Smith's first two novels: *White Teeth* (2000) and *The Autograph Man* (2002). I argue that the father, Samad Iqbal in *White Teeth*, refuses to embrace his multifaceted, ambiguous identity, and instead adopts a binary mindset, which significantly affects his parenting choices and therefore influences the national identity formation of his twin sons. Alex Li-Tandem, the protagonist of *The Autograph Man*, similarly works to understand his complex identity with oversimplified methods. I assert that both texts demonstrate the inadequacies of essentialist thinking because the multicultural environment of the twentieth century necessitates a willingness to accept multiple, complex identities and to explore one's own intersectionality. Taken together, the works of Joyce, Kureishi, and Smith show that the archetype of the father and son relationship remains a valuable lens through which to explore essentialism, multiculturalism, and hybridity.

KEYWORDS: Modern Literature, James Joyce, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith,  
Identity, Fathers

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FATHERS AND SONS IN MODERN BRITISH, IRISH, AND  
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## DEDICATION

To Mom, Dad, and Chuck for all of the unconditional love and support.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a 2017 essay titled “The Bathroom,” the British author Zadie Smith relates artistic creation to childrearing, noting that her father sacrificed his artistic goals as a photographer in order to focus on the day-to-day task of making money for his family in London, England. Her parents established a foundational, lower middle-class existence for the family, and Smith describes the liberating quality of that life. She didn’t feel as though she had to “redeem [her] parents’ own thwarted ambitions” or exceed their modest achievements because they were relatively secure on their own (Smith 356-57). These circumstances gave young Zadie the freedom to focus on writing while both of her brothers pursued musical careers. In discussing her own children, Smith says, “...well, they have to live around and about and within the art-making of their parents; they have to listen to us talk about the books we’re writing or reading, of films we’ve seen or films we want to write, and they have always known, from the start, that they are not the only things being created, cared for and raised up in this many-roomed house” (363-64). Smith’s description of this contemporary domestic space simultaneously fostering the development of children and art illustrates the critical role that family units play in preserving, reproducing, and generating art—works that carry history, culture, and traditions into posterity.

Situated within the family unit, the father and son relationship has been the focus of numerous major works of literature. Homer’s hero, Odysseus, abandons his kingdom for the Trojan War and takes many years to return home, and leaves his son, Telemachus, to contend with the problems at home. Many stories of fathers and sons are found in the Bible. And Shakespeare’s Prince Hamlet is famously visited by the ghost of his father,

the deceased king, who demands revenge for his murder. Stories of fathers and sons, which often represent generational conflict on a larger scale, can be stories of love, trust, and loyalty, but can also focus on struggle, small-scale jealousy, competition, responsibility, and even revenge. These narratives continue to permeate our writings and therefore a need for analysis persists. In a collection of essays titled *Naming the Father* (2000), editors Eva Paulino Bueno, Terry Caesar, and William Hummel write in their introduction: "...modern and contemporary literature has been understood too little by either refusing or presuming to understand fatherhood" (8). The primary question guiding this study is: in what ways and to what extent do a sampling of anticolonial and postcolonial writers use the archetypal relationship of father and son to explore the formation of national identity?

According to Charles Taylor in "The Politics of Recognition," "identity" may be defined as "a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being" (25). Each individual's subject position is made up of varied factors including gender, race, socioeconomic class, and religion. Elements at the core of one's individuality do not emerge in isolation. Rather, as Taylor goes on to say, "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (25). Our interactions with others help to define our distinguishing traits, and the unit that prepares us to function among those others is the family, described by British and Guyanese postcolonial critic Paul Gilroy as "the key unit out of which nationality is built, as well as the central means of cultural reproduction"

(30). Gilroy makes explicit the link between family and nation, between filial relations, and the transmission of culture.

The connection between family, nation, and tradition is an ancient one and can certainly be found in the language of T.S. Eliot, who wrote in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), “But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time than this: a piety toward the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote” (301). As in Eliot’s famous essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), Eliot, like many modernist writers, was preoccupied with the relationship between the cultural past and the present, and between present writers and their ancestral predecessors. The bond of which Eliot speaks connects departed grandfathers to both living heirs and future offspring. Men have historically—and continue to—rely upon sons to continue their lineage, passing on not only the family name but also the traditions and customs of the family. In the context of British culture, the custom of primogeniture is important, under which a man would transfer the whole of his property and wealth to the eldest son. The responsibility of maintaining or improving the family reputation, producing a subsequent male heir, and sometimes continuing in the father’s line of work then falls upon that son, or sons.

However, the ties by which these duties bind the son are constructed by law. It could be argued that a mother’s role is biological, natural, and self-evident, whereas a father’s role, on the other hand, is based on language, story, and what critic Christine van Boheemen calls “oral designation” (31). As Freud notes in “Family Romances,” “paternity is always uncertain” (238), but “the whole progress of society rests upon the opposition between successive generations” (237). According to Freudian theory, the son

feels animosity for the father from a very early age, and that antagonism can last a lifetime. Irish writer Frank O'Connor (1903-66) illustrates the so-called Oedipal theme in his famous short story, "My Oedipus Complex" (1963). The son cleaves to his mother and admires his father, until he returns home from the war and replaces the son in the maternal bed, causing direct competition for the mother's affection, prompting him to intentionally agitate the father by waking him during the night. By the end of the story, the father and son develop a companionable relationship and are sleeping together as pals due to the arrival of a new infant who demands the mother's attention.

O'Connor's story finishes before the inevitable struggle between father and maturing son begins, but another example of generational conflict can be seen in Edmund Gosse's famous autobiography, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (1907). Raised in a strict Plymouth Brethren family, Edmund Gosse must choose to embrace or rebel against the values of his father, the well-known and influential anti-Darwinian zoologist Philip Henry Gosse. Defining his own identity and beliefs, Gosse's memoir captures a unique moment in time. His father was a man of the Victorian Age, rejecting Darwin's evolutionary theories based on his fundamentalist religious beliefs, arguing that ancient fossils were created by God to test man's faith. Gosse chooses to reject his father's dogmatic religious views in favor of logic, reason, and science. It is important to note that part of Gosse's accepted identity is a rejection of the father. In this way, the father wields great power and control. What is on one level a philosophical and theological dispute is on another level an inter-generational conflict and struggle for survival of the self—the self based on individuation and self-definition, rather than merely an argument about religious and scientific truth.

Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet is defined by his relationship to his father. The pair contrasts sharply in character: the father was a man of action, poisoned by his own brother Claudius, but Prince Hamlet is unforgettably wayward and indecisive. The king's ghost's appearance to the son serves as the impetus for the action in the play. It is Hamlet's slow and much-delayed revenge—all in reaction to the father, to whom he swore an oath of vengeance in the play's first Act—that defines him. Nearly all of Hamlet's actions and inactions throughout the play are responses to his father's murder and the encounter with his father's ghost. Thus, not only in life but also in death, the son is defined in relation to the father, and we shall see the return of Hamlet's father and Shakespeare's father in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

When an infant is born into a family, he or she enters a crowded space filled with family history, cultural and religious beliefs, expectations, traditions, and practices. So too when an artist enters into the world of self-expression, he or she must contend with all those who came before and all those who will come after and negotiate his or her own identity as an artist in relation to the existing art of the past, to the artistic forefathers and foremothers. The artist is an inheritor, but he or she may pick and choose what to inherit. They may reject what they inherit in order to “make it new” in Ezra Pound's famous phrase. In the seminal critical work of literary influence of the 1970s, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Harold Bloom explains that no poet composes in isolation but is necessarily influenced by predecessors, and “every poet begins (however ‘unconsciously’) by rebelling more strongly against the consciousness of death's necessity than all other men and women do” (10). In theorizing how artists may “misread” an earlier work and attempt to correct it or how they may fight to be free of a

constraining form established by a precursor, Bloom uses Freud's family romance. Sons are unavoidably influenced by their fathers, whether the father is absent or present. Bloom quotes Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him" (6). The song and the play alluded to here—as well as the one Great Poem that Shelley supposed poets of all ages contributed to (Bloom 19)—make up the fabric of cultural life.

For Bloom, the burgeoning male poet had to kill the father in order to find communion with the mother muse, which means he would "swerve" away from the influence of the father, accepting part of his inheritance, but rejecting the rest in order to move in a new direction and find his own voice. The aim was individuation, originality and creative independence. The Bloomian reading of literary relations became influential on much of the literary criticism of the 1970s and long after, and I cite it here as a powerful example of how the father and son relationship was understood in literary or cultural terms. Similarly, I argue that Joyce was indebted to the writers of the Irish Literary Revival but "swerved" from them and subverted them, and contemporary British writers like Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith are deeply indebted to but nevertheless "swerve" from and go far beyond the classic English novelists whom they read at university.

One aspect of that life that may transfer between an artist and a reader or a father and a son is a conception of national identity. In the case of Gosse, the focus is on the



question of religious conviction, not on national identity. Gosse is an Englishman just like his father—only with a revised and religiously agnostic set of values and beliefs. The same cannot be said of all father and son relationships in British literature of the twentieth century. Much of the literature categorized as “British” actually emerges from colonial and postcolonial experiences in the former British Empire. Such literature was formerly known as “Commonwealth Literature,” referring to literature of the British Commonwealth (an association of 53 states which were former members of the British Empire), but since the 1970s, this body of literature has come to be described as Global Anglophone or Postcolonial Literature. In this dissertation I will discuss the work of James Joyce, who portrays the anti-Catholic, anti-religious, anti-authoritarian and ultimately anti-colonial attitudes of his hero Stephen Dedalus in Dublin in 1904, twenty years before Irish Partition. I will also discuss the work of Hanif Kureishi, a Briton of Pakistani background, and Zadie Smith, a Briton whose mother was Jamaican. The theme of father and son relationships persists, but I assert that these exchanges take on new and significant meanings in a world where one’s personal sense of national identity is complex, hybrid, divided, contested, and more difficult to determine.

When understood factually, “national identity” is a question of citizenship and birthright; however, I will use the term in the theoretical sense developed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983), Paul Gilroy in a number of critical texts during the 1990s, and Ernest Gellner in *Nationalism* (1997). Critics agree that “nationalism” was not a term in wide general use until the end of the nineteenth century. Anderson defines “nation” not as a geographical place where one is born but as “an imagined political community” (6). It is “inherently limited” and is considered

“imagined” because “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). They are brought together by shared concerns and shared cultural markers. For Gellner, the concept of a nation is rooted in modernity and relies upon shared culture that may be disseminated through education and language. “Nationalism is a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic social bond” (Gellner 3). If we accept this explanation of nationalism, what happens when people of various cultures are controlled by one sovereign head of state as in the case of the United Kingdom’s expansive, former colonial rule? Are all subjects expected to assimilate into British culture, to internalize the beliefs of the ruling nation and exhibit the cultural markers of that nation such as language? According to the principle of nationalism as Gellner sees it, yes, the political unit and the ethnic unit, based on shared cultures, must be congruent: “One culture, one state” (45).

Nationalist attitudes in the United Kingdom were greatly impacted by The British Nationality and Aliens Act of 1914, which can be described as liberal and inclusive. It granted British citizenship to those 1.) born within the crown’s dominions, 2.) those born with a British father (by birth or naturalization), and 3.) those born aboard a British ship within or outside British territorial waters (Goulbourne 92). By the early 1960s, after a prolonged period of Caribbean immigration to Great Britain from 1948 through about 1970, a more conservative and nativist, nationalist attitude began to emerge in public discourse, epitomized by the Conservative Party’s Enoch Powell’s infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech on 20 April 1968. In this speech, Powell predicted that the number of Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants would surpass the nonimmigrant

residents in England (“Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' Speech”). Then in 1978 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher gave a televised election speech expressing anxieties that “people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture” (Thatcher). British cultural studies critic Stuart Hall points to the beginning of Thatcher’s government as a critical moment for English (and British) national identity, connected to a set of economic, social, and political policies and a general attitude which became known as “Thatcherism<sup>1</sup>.” Hall wrote that “Culturally, the project of Thatcherism is defined as a form of ‘regressive modernization’—the attempt to ‘educate’ and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity by, paradoxically, dragging it backwards through an equally regressive version of the past” (2). Many of Thatcher’s speeches and political actions were interpreted as nationalistic and xenophobic, promoting an ethnic understanding of the British nation. Harry Goulbourne describes her as “...unifying the British (white, European) nation whilst keeping at bay or on the periphery non-white minorities” (125). Similar rhetoric exists in the current debates surrounding Brexit and the United States’ borders. We might compare this contrast between definitions of an ethnic (traditional) and a civic (modern) nationalism with the moment in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* when Leopold Bloom, Irish but Jewish, asserts to the Citizen, who is an extreme Irish ethnic nationalist, that “a nation is the same people living in the same place” (331).

As Anderson indicates, nationalism is “an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community” (101). This strategy may rely upon visual

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<sup>1</sup> Thatcherism was considered a close relation of “Reaganism” in the United States, where Thatcher’s ally President Ronald Reagan supported similar economic and political theories.

markers of culture that the dominant groups view as threatening; therefore, nationalism is often racialized. Anderson differentiates between racism and nationalism, but Gilroy, in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (1993) rejects this differentiation in the case of England. In the words of Gilroy, “Blackness and Englishness are constructed as incompatible, mutually exclusive identities. To speak of the British or English people is to speak of the white people” (27-8).

At the core of the discourse surrounding nationalism and national identity is the family unit. As Gilroy explains in chapter three of *Small Acts*, culture is primarily and “naturally” reproduced in families. “The nation is, in turn, conceived as a neat, symmetrical accumulation of family units and the supposedly homogeneous culture...culminates in the experience of unified and continuous national identity” (Gilroy 64). This dissertation analyzes the work of three authors writing in the context of anticolonial Ireland and modern “postcolonial” Britain to explore how the depictions of father and son relationships can function to elucidate notions of national identity.

In Chapter 1, “Relocating the Spiritual Father: Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom,” I begin by looking at James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) as a semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman. The relationship between Stephen and his biological father is discussed with particular emphasis on the importance of the family name. Stephen’s growth as an artist is examined in connection with his Irish identity, a conflict that results in self-exile. The chapter then turns to the character of the same name in *Ulysses* (1922) and his interactions with Leopold Bloom who is widely accepted by critics as functioning as a more suitable and fulfilling father figure for Stephen. My reading will show that rather than solely bonding in a spiritual or symbolic father and son

relationship, Bloom and Stephen learn from one another and build a rapport as friends, companions, and in a sense, fellow fathers. Bloom is a literal father of two children (one deceased) and a man who is closely in touch with physical aspects of life. Stephen, on the other hand, is a son who has a complicated and distant relationship with his biological father, Simon Dedalus, but he is striving to become his own man, an intellectual aesthete, an artist with his own personal vision of the world, a father of art, or a father-creator, in an artistic sense. As Stephen—like Joyce himself—works to find a modern voice with which to represent Ireland, Bloom shows him new ways to understand both nationhood and masculinity.

In Chapter 2, I move forward in time to 1990 and turn to a Bildungsroman of the late twentieth century. After looking briefly at Hanif Kureishi's biographical relationship with his own father, I focus on the protagonist of his most famous work to date: *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Using Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and third space, I look at how Karim, a biracial, burgeoning actor, negotiates his place in 1970s London. Karim enjoys a special relationship with his father, Haroon, the eponymous character of the novel who has learned to wield his perceived exoticism for gains in social capital. I argue that the father and son's rapport, coupled with the actions of a secondary father in the text, illustrates the benefit of commodifying hybridity in postcolonial England—"postcolonial" in the sense that Britain has lost the empire by the 1970s and is negotiating how to absorb an influx of immigrants from the four corners of the British Commonwealth. At this point in history, perhaps Britain is both looking back to an empire now lost and looking forward to a multicultural, multiracial society.

The first section of Chapter 3, “Fathers and Sons in the Early Work of Zadie Smith,” analyzes *White Teeth* (2000). While my reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia* concentrates primarily on the son, my interpretation of *White Teeth* highlights the efforts of a Bengali father living in England, Samad Iqbal, to control the destinies of his children. I analyze Samad’s experiences in World War II, especially as they relate to Samad’s fixation on the heroic deeds of an ancestral father. My reading will show that Samad’s life, first as a soldier, then as a working father in Willesden, London, leads him to both fear and despise his own hybridity. Rather than embrace his complex, ambiguous identity, Samad adopts a binary mindset, dividing his perceptions of culture into two distinct categories: eastern and western. According to Samad, one’s essential characteristics derive from one’s bloodline—in his case, from the lineage of Mangel Pande—and by avoiding environments of corruption, one might maintain a fixed identity aligned with the past. These beliefs significantly affect Samad’s parenting choices and thus influence the national identity formation of his twin sons.

The latter section of Chapter 3 examines Smith’s sophomore novel, *The Autograph Man* (2002), to explore the depiction of a Jewish-Chinese-English man, Alex-Li Tandem, who must establish his identity in the aftermath of his father’s sudden death. I draw connections between *White Teeth* and *The Autograph Man* in that both feature characters who, while working to understand their identities, try oversimplified methods and fail. I argue that both texts demonstrate the inadequacies of essentialist thinking because the multicultural environment of late twentieth century Britain necessitates a willingness to accept multiple, complex identities and to explore one’s own intersectionality. The term “intersectionality” has become commonplace in sociology and

in cultural criticism and is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”

As Paul Gilroy writes, “The discourse of family and the discourse of nation are very closely connected “ (203). As a whole, I have tried in “Fathers and Sons in Modern British, Irish, and Postcolonial Fiction” to question the ways in which familial connections, specifically the father and son relationship, help to shape national identity and national belonging in modern anticolonial or postcolonial cultures, including Ireland at the dawn of the twentieth century and Britain in the late twentieth century. I assert that a selection of authors continue to use the archetypal father and son relationship to interrogate the formation of national identity and the problems of national belonging for members of immigrant or minority groups that experience marginalization in relation to a former, colonial mainstream culture.

## CHAPTER 1: RELOCATING THE SPIRITUAL FATHER: STEPHEN DEDALUS AND LEOPOLD BLOOM

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), a classic example of the Bildungsroman, follows Stephen Dedalus on his coming-of-age journey in early 20th century Ireland. As is the case with most Bildungsromans, the protagonist must separate from his parents, especially the father, in order to find his true calling in the wider world. Stephen's quest aligns with Gerald Peters' description of the Bildungsroman in *The Mutilating God: Authorship and Authority in the Narrative of Conversion*: "In the earliest sense of the word, Bildung involved making oneself into the unified image/*Portrait* (Bild) of a divine Author" (65).

The narrative itself in *Portrait* shifts from the third person to Stephen's first person perspective as he begins to acquire the creative voice of an author at the novel's end. Before he can reach this goal, however, he must break away from his father whose legacy Stephen deems unworthy of inheritance. In addition to the family attachment, Stephen feels doubly bound by Catholicism and restrictive notions of Irishness as defined by the Irish Literary Revival. In chapter 5 of *Portrait*, Joyce famously writes, "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (182). And at the very end of the novel, Stephen writes in his diary that he will find a way to "forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (224). The image of the smithy's forge refers to the workshop of Daedalus, a figure in Greek mythology and Stephen's namesake. This final declaration presents Stephen's desire to craft an artistic representation of his nation that has previously not existed. The words "uncreated conscience" are particularly suggestive, since they imply that members of his



Irish race have hitherto lacked a conscience—a terrible indictment of the moral courage of his nation.

In order to realize this lofty objective, Stephen feels he must escape the entrapments of his identity as a late colonial subject of the British Empire. Joyce's use of the word "race" is significant when we consider the historical context. Joyce began writing *Portrait* in 1904, the same year that Francis Galton (Charles Darwin's cousin) endowed a research fellowship in national eugenics. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) had been published nearly fifty years earlier and social Darwinism in Great Britain was intensifying anti-Irish sentiment. Stereotyped images of the drunken, violent, ape-like Irishman appeared in publications like *Punch* and *Harper's Weekly*. By evoking the language of race in the closing lines of *Portrait*, Joyce reminds readers of the many challenges facing the Irish people as a whole in the struggle for nationhood. Stephen's professed commitment to represent his countrymen in those words echo what Joyce wrote to his wife, Nora Barnacle: "I am one of the writers of his generation who are perhaps creating at last a conscience in the soul of this wretched race" (qtd. in Fuller 14). Again, the choice of the word "conscience" is significant in its connection to Roman Catholicism. Joyce feels that the Irish people have historically depended upon the leadership of the Church to guide their moral decisions, whereas he, like Stephen Dedalus, wants to see his countrymen engage in intellectual inquiry on their own, independent from the influence of the Church.

This mirroring of language is only one of many similarities between James Joyce and his young artist. While not entirely autobiographical, Joyce derived much of *Portrait* from a longer, semi-autobiographical novel titled *Stephen Hero* (published posthumously

in 1944), “but the characters and events, though loosely based on real people and real events, are creatively refracted through the consciousness of a fictional character” (Bulson 50). That character’s name is of course Stephen Dedalus—a pseudonym that Joyce used for publication of the *Dubliners* stories in 1904 (Ellmann 164)—whose name evokes a celebrated father and son relationship from Greek mythology. Dedalus was a talented craftsman who created wings out of feathers and wax for himself and his son, Icarus. Despite his father’s warning, Icarus flew too close to the sun. Joyce’s incorporation of the Icarus myth is interesting in that Dedalus is the father in the myth but because it is the surname of the protagonist in *Portrait*, both father and son are the artists, the creators. Simon Dedalus is a creator of life, Stephen, and as the title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* indicates, the story focuses on young Stephen’s development into an independent artist—a craftsman like his namesake. Near the end of chapter 4, Stephen has a vision of a “hawklike man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end of he had been born to serve ... a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being” (153). Moments like these lead Stephen to understand his name as a kind of prophecy; he will create his own identity. The workshop in his vision refers again to the smithy’s forge, a place where the creative process occurs. A man being described as “hawklike” suggests that Stephen will need to be independent and solitary, “soaring” above his “sluggish” day-to-day life in Dublin.

### **The Father and the Family Name**

Like Stephen, Joyce reflected upon his family name and famously wrote upon the birth of his son, Giorgio, “I think a child should be allowed to take his father’s or

mother's name at will on coming of age. Paternity is a legal fiction" (qtd. in Ellmann 205). These sentiments are reiterated in the voice of *Ulysses'* Stephen Dedalus as he presents his reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?" (*U* 207). These assertions clarify the way that Stephen views his relationship with his father, Simon: he is bound to him through language—specifically the family name or surname, which is a significant symbol of most father and son relationships (Baxter 217).<sup>2</sup>

The first words spoken by a character outside of Stephen's family are "What is your name?" asked by Nasty Roche. Ironically, with a name like "Nasty Roche," he follows-up on Stephen's reply with "What kind of name is that?" and "What is your father?" "Nasty" is a school nickname, but "Roche" is a common Irish name. "Dedalus," on the other hand, is Greek—a rare, foreign name in Ireland. Stephen's surname then functions to mark him as an outsider. The hero is set apart from the other boys, designated as extraordinary rather than common. Stephen's classmate is not interested in "who" Stephen's father is but "what" he is, indicating that the individual identity of the father does not matter; rather, the father's rank or status in society helps to establish Stephen's place in the schoolboy hierarchy. This opening scene establishes the importance of father and son relationships—how the son is continually associated with or haunted by the actions and status of the father. Stephen is marked as a young Dedalus who is the son of an older Dedalus as if the mythic figure of Daedalus has been split in two.

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Culleton adds that "naming is a legacy of male tradition" (72), which conveys both privilege and power. In the Old Testament, Adam is the first namer; his acts presume "an instant comprehension of the thing named" (Culleton 73).

The significance of Stephen's relationship with his biological father, Simon, is underscored by its inclusion in *Portrait's* opening chapter. Here, as elsewhere in *Portrait* and throughout *Ulysses*, Joyce uses indirect free style, a type of third-person narration, which presents a character's perspective mediated in part by the voice of the author.<sup>3</sup> The first chapter makes clear to the reader that Stephen is a young child who enjoys stories told by his father: "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo" (20). Stephen internalizes the message conveyed by the father: "He was baby tuckoo" (20). In this way, from page one of *Portrait*, Simon shapes Stephen's view of the world. Seamus Deane adds, "In *Portrait*, Stephen Dedalus is, so to speak, quoted into existence by nursery rhymes, political squabbles, church doctrine, literature. Then, he responds by quoting on his own initiative—Aquinas, the villanelle, the diary. Possessed by language, he comes to possess it" (179). Deane suggests that that this early story-telling scene clearly connects to Stephen's later attempts to invent and reinvent himself using literary quotations. Hence, the character of Stephen is linked to literary passages from the beginning of his journey to the end.

As Stephen grows and matures, he makes sense of the world around him with words. More specifically, he uses naming as a way to perfect his language skills and as a way to understand his distinctive self. He examines the proper nouns assigned to him and his surroundings. For instance, in chapter 1, he lists his name and his location in his Geography book, perhaps taking comfort in the orderliness of proper names and certainly positioning himself in relation to the enormity of the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction*, p.32.

*Stephen Dedalus*  
*Class of Elements*  
*Clongowes Wood College*  
*Sallins*  
*County Kildare*  
*Ireland*  
*Europe*  
*The World*  
*The Universe (28)*

Stephen's list begins with the self, the particularities of his youthful experience, and gradually widens outside of his county—outside of his country. With this methodical list, Stephen is putting himself into perspective, working to understand how he connects to others and other places. Eugene O'Brien reads this as foreshadowing that Stephen will one day leave Ireland (221). Even at this early stage of the novel, Stephen is able to visualize surpassing the "nets" thrown over him by nationhood, escaping to a more global identity.

The name that Stephen shares with his father is brought to the forefront in an important scene when Stephen travels with Simon to their original hometown of Cork, a journey that Maud Ellmann calls a return "to the land of his fathers" (81). During this trip, Simon dwells in his past and maintains a nostalgic outlook on virtually everything. For example, after singing a song that Stephen enjoys, Mr. Dedalus cannot simply enjoy his son's compliment. Instead, he recalls Mick Lacy: "Ah, but you should have heard Mick Lacy sing it! Poor Mick Lacy! He had little turns for it, gracenotes he used to put in

that I haven't got" (89). Furthermore, when the pair shares breakfast, Mr. Dedalus and the waiter interact "at crosspurposes" because the waiter confuses the present-day Mr. Dedalus with his father and/or grandfather. The persistence of the past during the trip to Cork affects Stephen to the point that "[b]y the time they had crossed the quadrangle his restlessness had risen to fever" (89). Nevertheless, son finds himself with father, visiting an important location from his youth: Queen's College. Simon goes into the anatomy theatre and, with the help of the porter, searches for his initials that he carved into a desk many years ago. Luke Thurston describes this tour as Stephen being "given a kind of symbolic 'gift' by being shown the paternal signature" (155). Whereas one's proper name signifies individuality, Simon Dedalus and Stephen Dedalus obviously share the same initials, which erase feelings of uniqueness. Maud Ellmann describes naming as a "primal scene of scarification" (131): as Simon has carved his designation into the desk, so has he passed it on to Stephen. As stated by Kent Baxter, "The adolescent's attempt to make a name for himself is both facilitated and frustrated by the 'double law of the name'; that creates the illusion that the proper name signifies an individuality, but always express this individuality in reference to the name of the father" (205). Baxter suggests that Stephen's focus on the word "Foetus" carved into a desk instead of his father's initials is the son's rejection of the opportunity to become his father. Stephen embraces the word "Foetus" because it represents birth, life, and potentiality. The foetus is the ultimate foreshadowing of human life—of childhood, adulthood, and the process of maturing. It is not tied to any specific individual, and it "bears no trace of a cultural predecessor or authorizer" (Thurston 156). Thus, Stephen can create his own identity without encumbrance.

Stephen “remain[s] in the background” in this scene and dwells upon the word, “Foetus.” He is overcome with emotion, feeling “the absent students from the college about him”: “A vision of their life, which his father’s words had been powerless to evoke, sprang up before him out of the word cut in the desk” (*Portrait* 89). In other words, Stephen’s imagination is piqued by this simple word; it arouses emotion in Stephen that Simon’s words cannot and thus undermines the father’s authority (Maud Ellmann 147). The word itself is significant for the purpose of this study as “Foetus is clearly the name of a potential being, the unborn human embodying precisely the creative temporality of ‘not yet’” (Thurston 155). A foetus, unlike a living child who is born, is the perfect embodiment of potential because as we are reminded in section 5 of *Portrait*, “Reproduction is the beginning of death” (205). In terms of his journey to self-realization, Stephen is in the early stages here, like a foetus; he holds potential but has only barely begun to develop, and neither his biological father nor his environment is fostering the development of the artist.

In fact, Simon often seems more focused on himself than on his son. Whereas Stephen is looking to the future and ruminating on what he may become, Simon is fixated on the past, nostalgic for his youth, and frustrated by his thwarted ambitions. Poignantly emphasized on the first page of *Portrait*, Simon looks not directly upon his progeny but “through a glass” (20). Again, he is engrossed with his own image in the mirror during the Christmas Eve scene of *Portrait*: “Mr. Dedalus looked at himself in the pierglass above the mantelpiece, waxed out his moustache-ends and then, parting his coattails, stood with his back to the glowing fire” (38). This distraction paired with his participation in the political talk diverts attention from Stephen who might rightly be the

center of attention as it is his first time joining the adults for Christmas dinner (Volpone 143).

### **The Young Artist**

In the aforementioned scene between father and son on page 1 of *Portrait*, Simon tells Stephen a story; thus, storytelling and the shaping of words is significant to the developing artist even in the crib. In trying to understand himself as an artist, even as a very young boy, he is preoccupied with words and the feelings that can resonate from them. He recognizes onomatopoeia and displays what Seamus Heaney calls “hyperconsciousness of words as physical sensations, as sounds to be plumbed, as weights on the tongue” (Heaney 160). For instance, he recognizes “Suck as a queer word” (*Portrait* 160) and demonstrates an acute awareness of the senses. Indirect free style is used once again to describe the sound of the cricket bat, “pick, pack, pock, puck” (65), and Stephen is particularly attuned to the olfactory senses: “This sense [of smell], the one least respected by man and the most highly developed in animals, is the one that Stephen still possesses and even values to a high degree” (Tucker 20).

When first at school, he notices the smell of the rector’s office and imagines the smell of burning turf. He is soothed by smells of “horse piss and rotted straw.” “It is a good odour to breathe. It will calm my heart. My heart is quite calm now. I will go back” (87). As Stephen matures, he makes peace with his animalistic desires for physical pleasures. He says that “we are all animals; I am also an animal” (184). Later in the novel, one of his epiphanies is to recognize his physical, animal and sexual self, and to combine it with his spiritual and aesthetic self. But first he must explore his animal self and become overpowered by it, before turning to a pious mortification of the flesh. By



novel's end, he learns to accept both sides of his nature. He begins to identify not only words with the senses, but also emotions with senses. In this way, artistic expression is coupled with bodily experiences like eating and satisfying sexual urges. He ruminates on the "foul long letters he had written in the joy of guilty confession and carried secretly for days and days" to leave in random places "where a girl might come upon them as she walked by and read them secretly" (110-11). In such manner, the physical urges of the adolescent boy are facilitating early efforts at artistry with the written word.

Stephen's obedience to the demands of his body is interrupted by the hell, fire, and brimstone sermon during the religious retreat described in Section 3 of *Portrait*. The sermon utilizes devouring language, and Stephen imagines being eaten up by rats and vermin after his death (112, 132). Similarly, the language used to describe Stephen's confession reveals the young man's attempts to mortify the flesh. It is framed as a purge of all that is grotesque: "His sins tricked from his lips, one by one, trickled in shameful drops from his soul festering and oozing like a sore, a squalid stream of vice. The last sins oozed forth, sluggish, filthy" (144). In the words of Maud Ellmann, this passage of "verbal and bodily secretions" "equates [Stephen's] words with blood, pus, urine, semen, excrement" (141), and after the catharsis of confession, Stephen "views food in a more neutral manner" (Tucker 19). In place of grotesque imagery, indicative of sensuous gluttony, he resorts to simpler, more objective descriptions such as "On the dresser was a plate of sausages and white pudding and on the shelf there were eggs. [...] How simple and beautiful was life after all!" (*Portrait* 134).

Stephen recognizes the transformative effect that his religious commitment has on his life. In chapter four, he is religious and pious, suppressing desires of the flesh, living

as a devout son of the father that is the Church. However, he begins to doubt the religious path as he foresees the years of devotion stretching out ahead of him and “the chill and order of the life repelled him” (147). He realizes additionally that his behavior is motivated by fear. When asked to join the priesthood, although initially drawn to the authority it could grant him, he refuses. Thus, he comes to reject the priesthood and all it represents, including the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the religious beliefs associated with it. Finally, he explicitly rejects the church by refusing to take communion on Easter Sunday to appease his ill and dying mother. In language that purposefully echoes the “Non Serviam” of Satan in the biblical story, he states, “ I will not serve” (211).

This chapter notably ends with the bird-girl epiphany, which brings together the bodily and the spiritual, a union that does not seem possible within the domain of the church. For example, in chapter 3, Stephen expresses discomfort when he ponders how one might pray or say Hail Marys with the same mouth that eats, sucks, performs sexual acts, and curses: “If ever his soul, re-entering her dwelling shyly after the frenzy of his body’s lust had spent itself, was turned towards her whose emblem is the morning star, ... it was when her names were murmured softly by lips whereon there still lingered foul and shameful words, the savour itself of a lewd kiss” (*Portrait* 102). The girl that Stephen observes at the beach is clearly connected to nature and to animal life, particularly the life of birds: “she seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird” (155). Seaweed has clung to her thigh; her breast is described like a bird’s. But this natural imagery is infused with spiritual imagery. Alan Dundes writes: “She is described in terms of ‘white,’ ‘ivory,’ ‘blue,’ ‘pure,’ and ‘dove’ as she stands

before the ‘worship of his eyes.’ The epiphany certainly has Virgin Mary overtones” (143). Similarly to how one may be spiritually “called” to serve in the Church, “her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call” (*Portrait* 156). She is “a wild angel,” a goddess, blending the sensuous with the religious; she is both a beautiful woman and a sexual being, a bird-like figure representing the potentiality of flight. The bird-girl scene is a culmination of Stephen’s preoccupations and leads to his resolution to escape—to fly away from his home country—and consummate his deepest passions.

### **Women and Mothers**

Although the purpose of this study is to illuminate the significance of father and son relationships in *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, it seems imperative to discuss Stephen’s relationship with his mother. If, as Joyce said, “Paternity is a legal fiction,” then maternity is natural—above the law of man—as well as indisputable.<sup>4</sup> That is to say that prior to DNA-testing, a father’s relationship to his son relied upon trust of the mother’s word. There was no doubting the child’s origin in the womb of the mother from which it was taken. It is the death of May Dedalus that brings Stephen back to Dublin in *Ulysses*. While the Stephen Dedalus of *Portrait* cannot be understood as exactly the same Stephen Dedalus of *Ulysses*, critics have widely understood them to be connected, and although not identical, affiliated in the mind of Joyce, as the two Stephens have come to be linked in the minds of readers. *Ulysses* can perhaps be seen as a sequel to *Portrait* (Oded 40). In a conversation with his friend, Georges Borach, Joyce referred to it as such, saying, “In Rome, when I had finished about half of the *Portrait*, I realized the Odyssey had to be the

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<sup>4</sup> In the late 19th century, German philosopher Frederick Engels wrote, “In all forms of family, it is uncertain who is the father of a child; but it is certain who its mother is,” *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884)

sequel, and I began to write *Ulysses*” (qtd. in Bulson 71). The Irish critic Enda Duffy argues that “nationalism as it is displayed in the opening episodes of the new novel [*Ulysses*] takes its cue from the ... final declaration of the earlier novel [*Portrait*]” (Duffy 41). As Anthony Burgess explains in 1965, “the exile foreshadowed at the end of *A Portrait*” is achieved in Stephen’s backstory in *Ulysses* (Burgess 95). Therefore, despite the obvious difference between the two texts and the clear differences between the figures of Stephen in the two novels, the Stephen of *Ulysses* can, in some ways, be understood as an extension of the protagonist of *Portrait*, a more mature although equally skeptical and questing version of the former.

Stephen’s mother plays an important role in his development, possibly even more so than Simon. By the end of *Portrait*, Stephen seems resolved to reject his father’s legacy as well as the religious faith he closely associates with his mother and exile himself from Ireland. In *Ulysses*, however, the mother’s death prompts his return, and her ghostly presence lingers with Stephen throughout *Ulysses*. Brenda Oded asserts that although Stephen attempts to disentangle himself from all biological connections, he is never able to truly free himself from his mother’s “smothering embrace” even after her death (40). Stephen’s preoccupation with his mother’s passing substantiates Charles Taylor’s theory regarding identity formation: “Even after we outgrow some of these [significant others]—our parents, for instance—and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live” (Taylor 33). In one revealing passage in “Telemachus,” Stephen has a vision of his mother’s decomposing corpse, which he finds utterly revolting and yet utterly overbearing. He struggles with

himself and with her to reject this ghastly maternal ghost in a moment of violent reproach: “Ghoul! Chewer of corpses! No mother. Let me be and let me live” (10).

As Suzette Henke has astutely noted, “Female characters are present everywhere and nowhere” in *Portrait* (50). She means that females, although largely absent from major scenes and rarely heard in dialogue, function symbolically in the text, and are often present or implied in Stephen’s memory, imagination, and consciousness. A series of female figures serve as mother figures, each “birthing” or giving life to Stephen in different ways: “Like the actual mother who has given birth to him physically, the other female figures give birth to him spiritually (the Virgin Mary), sensually (the prostitute) and artistically (the bird-girl)” (Oded 40-1). One important iteration of this is a woman associated with milk. Two versions of this figure appear—one in *Portrait* and one in *Ulysses*.

In chapter five of *Portrait*, Davin tells Stephen about a critical and formative sexual temptation. He had been walking home one evening from a sports event at Thurles and stopped in the dark of night at a cottage for a glass of water. Davin describes his experience:

After a while a young woman opened the door and brought me out a big mug of milk. She was half undressed as if she was going to bed when I knocked and she had her hair hanging and I thought by her figure and by something in the look of her eyes that she must be carrying a child. She kept me in talk a long while at the door and I thought it strange because her breast and her shoulders were bare.  
(164)

Like a mother offering milk to her child, this woman offers sustenance to Davin. Perhaps like Mother Ireland, she desires to retain her sons. Upon hearing this story, Stephen mentally connects this woman with other peasant women like her, “a type of her race” (165), by which he means “the batlike souls” of lonely Irish women who are filled with longing even when married. This leads Stephen to consider the hidden undercurrents of sexual desire and passion, which are controlled and suppressed by the Puritanical regulation of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Edward Hirsch explains, “Beyond their real differences, most Irish writers had a common belief in a single undifferentiated entity called ‘the peasants.’ This process of turning the peasants into a single figure of literary art (‘the peasant’) may be termed the ‘aestheticizing’ of the Irish country people” (1117). Edward Said addresses the symbol of the peasant as well in *Culture and Imperialism*. When it comes to establishing a national identity, writers “search for authenticity” and “a more congenial national origin than provided by colonial history” (226). They often look to individuals tied to the land, representative of the essence of national life. Irish writers at this time specifically desired to upend the stereotypical image of Irishness and replace it with a spiritual figure, “the living embodiment of the ‘Celtic’ imagination, a ‘natural’ aristocrat” (Hirsch 1119-120).

What is significant about this particular version of the peasant woman is her pregnancy and what Davin perceives as an invitation to her bed. She says that she is alone, her husband is away, and she invites Davin to “Come in and stay the night here. You’ve no call to be frightened” (165). The naïve and sexually inexperienced Davin is troubled by the encounter. Her maternal body and the offering of nourishing milk are inviting and comforting, but there is for him a threatening, even a sinister element. After

all, she is luring him into an adulterous situation and he feels that if he enters, it will be difficult to escape. If the figure of the milk woman in *Telemachus*, who does not speak a word of the revered Gaelic language, is interpreted as Joyce's subversion of the traditional figure of Mother Ireland, sacred to the imagination of the Celtic Revival, Davin's peasant woman may be considered yet another subversion of that pious, innocent figure. As we know from the satirical *Portrait* of Miss Ivors in "The Dead," Joyce found it important to interrogate the pieties of the Yeatsian Celtic Revival and of the Gaelic cultural movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Stephen later says in *Portrait* (still speaking to Davin), "Do you know what Ireland is? ... Ireland is the old sow that eats her own farrow" (182). She, Mother Ireland, gives life to her children but also destroys them. Stephen loves and appreciates his mother, but the pressure he feels from her to take part in religious devotions is stifling; she becomes associated with the religion symbolized by the bird-catching "nets" that Stephen wants to "fly by" in his famous revolutionary and anti-nationalist speech to Davin in *Portrait*.

The old milk woman in "Telemachus," perhaps symbolic of a life-giving nation, is unable to understand the Irish that Haines speaks to her. Speaking Gaelic, while idealized and promoted by the Irish Literary Revival, and spoken widely in the west of Ireland, traditional homeland of peasant life, was not common in Dublin where the novel is set. Buck Mulligan explains Haines' expectations by saying, "He's English, ... and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland" (*U* 14). A disconnect exists between the "real" Irish people and the aestheticized version. Stephen, like Joyce, is skeptical of the quality of idealized and mythologizing artistic creations emerging from the Anglo-Irish literary and cultural movement at the time. On May 8, 1899, Joyce and some friends attended a

performance of Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen*, which is based on the legend of an idealized countess who, in a compassionate effort to save her tenants from starvation, sells her soul to the devil. Despite the countess's redemption in the end, many Irish nationalists were angered by what they perceived as blasphemy in the play. Two days after the performance, a letter was written in protest that Joyce did not sign. Although Joyce did not approve of the idealized romanticism of Yeats' work at this time, he was a proponent of free speech. He believed that an artist must stay true to his vision without concern for public opinion—or in his words, “the favour of the multitude” (“The Day of the Rabblement” 18).

In 1901, when Joyce was a 19-year-old student at University in Dublin, he wrote about *The Countess Cathleen* protest in an essay titled “The Day of the Rabblement.” Here, he writes, “Until he has freed himself from the mean influences about him ... no man is an artist at all” (18). Furthermore, “A nation which never advanced so far as a miracle-play affords no literary model to the artist, and he must look abroad” (16). Joyce did not see the Irish Literary Revival as adequate in representing the consciousness of Ireland. He often mocked it—referred to it as the “cultic twalette” (Tindall 14)—and saw it, in critic Declan Kiberd's words, as “an imitation of the original English model, rather than a radical renovation of the consciousness of the Irish race” (Kiberd, “Introduction” xiii).

### **Words: The Craftsman's Tools**

To achieve greatness, an artist must have the tools he needs to create. As we have seen, young Stephen experiments with words and phrases, noticing the sounds and feelings connected to them. Part of Stephen's learning to use language is necessarily



connected to his position in a colonized Ireland. The most poignant example of this occurs when Stephen gets into a lexical debate with the dean of studies, an Englishman.

In reference to pouring oil into a lamp, the following interaction takes place:

—What funnel? asked Stephen.

—The funnel through which you pour the oil into your lamp.

—That? said Stephen. Is that called a funnel? Is it not a tundish?

—That. The ... the funnel.

—Is that called a tundish in Ireland? Asked the dean. I never heard the word in my life. (169)

A “tundish” is an archaic word for a funnel in English, but here it is Stephen, an Irish boy, who knows and uses the word while the Englishman does not. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said describes this as the moment when Stephen begins to understand the consequences of colonial education in which the colonial history and languages are promoted and the history of the native country is demoted (Said 223).

Stephen remarks upon his experience:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (170)

Notice that the words Joyce uses in this passage—the ones that will sound different coming from Stephen than from an Englishman—signify many of Stephen’s points of

departure from Ireland. Stephen leaves home at the end of *Portrait* (home); Stephen rejects his religious upbringing (Christ). Drinking ale as a cultural behavior is something that Simon very much enjoys and may connect to a version of masculinity that Stephen dismisses. And, finally, master. Stephen Dedalus desires to be his own master.

The phrase “I will not serve” appears at three different points in *Portrait* (112, 211, 218). Marjorie Howes argues that Stephen’s “estrangement from the language in which he writes marks a classic colonial condition, in which the colonizers try to force their language and culture upon the colonized” (qtd. in Dukes 251). Because he is growing up to become an artist—to use words to construct meaning—the conversation about the tundish is significant to Stephen’s maturation. He is haunted by the moment and reflects upon it in his diary in Chapter 5: “That tundish has been on my mind for a long time. I looked it up and find it English and good old blunt English too. Damn the dean of studies and his funnel! What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us? Damn him one way or the other!” (222). Here, we can see the intense resentment that Stephen holds against English colonial rule. English is Stephen’s native tongue and thus it is the language that Stephen will use to write about Ireland. But, as Eric Bulson explains, Stephen’s acceptance of English and rejection of the Irish language is “fraught with contradictions” (55). He does not believe that a language like Gaelic should be revived for political purposes, but yet he recognizes the imperial power that the English language symbolizes. Bulson writes, “Stephen may never feel at home in the English language, but by using it to articulate an Irish experience he can make it foreign to the English” (56). In *Portrait*, Stephen becomes aware of the complexities of his national identity, and whether or not we view the Stephen Dedalus of *Ulysses* as the

same character or a new version of an earlier character, his meditations on national identity and how it will impact his artistic achievements continue.

In an echo of the kind of iconoclastic and anti-nationalist attitude behind the “nets” comment at the end of *Portrait*, Stephen says early in *Ulysses*, “History ... is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (34). The suggestion is that Ireland is burdened by its history, and its people are mired in the past. This quotation implies that Stephen is heroically trying to fight against that tendency to be shaped, dominated and predetermined by the national past. The words suggest an utter lack of reverence for national history and national pieties, and a fierce determination to escape that past. Stephen is resolved to wake up, to emerge out of the bonds of history and escape the “nets” of nationality: the Roman Catholic Church, and (to him) stultifying conventions of the Gaelic Revival. Over the course of the day in Dublin, June 16, 1904, Stephen develops a relationship with Mr. Leopold Bloom—an affiliation often interpreted as a surrogate father and son relationship. The validity of this reading is difficult to dispute as *Ulysses* clearly uses Homer’s *The Odyssey* as a structural foundation. Stephen is aligned with Telemachus, the son; Bloom represents the wandering Odysseus who, despite a number of obstacles, finds his way back home to his wife, Penelope, here played by Molly. Just as Joyce uses the Icarus myth to connect *Portrait* to tradition, he uses *The Odyssey* to tie *Ulysses* securely to the long history of literature. But his adaptation of the epic tale is uniquely modern, and he demythologizes *Ulysses*, the character in literature that Joyce considered “the complete, all-round character” due to his varied roles as son, father, husband, lover, and warrior (Ellmann 449). In a conversation with Frank Budgen,

Joyce also described "quick-witted" *Ulysses* as an "inventor," a creator. Thus in his own way, Bloom/*Ulysses* is an artist like the young Stephen Dedalus.

I will argue that upon encountering Bloom, Stephen does not only find a more fulfilling and more worthy spiritual father, but also he finds a "fellow father," a man who is in touch with the physical aspects of life as resolutely as Stephen is in touch with transcendent and intellectual thought. In the following pages, I will show that Bloom affirms Stephen's beliefs that there are a number of ways one can be "Irish"—and indeed a number of ways one can realize masculinity. When Bloom and Stephen look into a mirror together in "Circe," episode 15 of *Ulysses*, they see Shakespeare, a symbol of immortal creation. My reading suggests that Bloom and Stephen, with their contrasting but complementary characteristics, unite to become a true artist, to carry forth a new vision of Ireland.

Thus far, we have seen the Stephen Dedalus of *Portrait* reject both his biological father and the patriarchy of the Catholic Church. Many critics assert that the Stephen Dedalus of *Ulysses* comes to embrace Leopold Bloom as a new spiritual father. Scholars such as Stuart Gilbert, Frank Budgen, Harry Levin, and Hugh Kenner feel that Bloom and Stephen represent the two temperaments of the modern cultural crisis (Kain 147). Stephen is the aesthete whereas Bloom is the common man; therefore, they fit together to represent the "wholeness of life" (Kain 155). In as many ways as they are different, though, these two characters share similarities. Like Stephen, Leopold Bloom feels he has disappointed a parent; as Stephen refuses to take communion with his mother, Bloom regrets not eating Kosher for his father (*U* 724). Both Bloom and Stephen have disappointed their respective parents by rejecting religious traditions beloved by their

families because they no longer believe in the values around which the traditions are built.

### **“A Touch of the Artist About Old Bloom”**

As Richard Ellmann has said, “Joyce’s intentions regarding Bloom have sometimes been misconstrued. Bloom is exceptional rather than average” (29). Bloom is not an ordinary everyman, but is in fact intellectually alert, questioning, and imaginative. He is not highly educated like Stephen, but he is a very thoughtful and intellectually curious individual. And if Stephen has become a stranger to the conventional Catholic culture of middle-class Ireland, Bloom too is an alien to that culture, partly by birth, but partly by disposition. Stephen is Joyce’s disillusioned insider, and Bloom is Joyce’s questioning outsider. Despite their differences, Bloom and Stephen have clear similarities as literary characters. In his own way, Bloom is also a burgeoning artist seeking to “father” his own creation and thus achieve immortality. As the character Lenehan says about Bloom: “He’s not one of your common or garden ... you know... There’s a touch of the artist about old Bloom” (235). Jefferey Simons provides numerous examples of how “Bloom is at home with linguistic play” throughout the text (86). Stephen writes secret, provocative letters left for women to find, and Bloom corresponds with an erotic pen pal, Martha. Bloom writes to her under the pseudonym, Henry Flower, which is important because it is self-generated—invented for himself for the purpose of creation (Culleton 27). The stream of consciousness narration shows that Stephen often thinks of literary references and quotations. Bloom does the same; his internal monologue includes songs, expressions, and bits of popular culture from Dublin at the time.

As we will see, Stephen Dedalus needs to make a connection with a person like Bloom in order to fulfill his destiny of representing Ireland through art. Bloom is much more in touch with the physicality of life than Stephen but their traits are presented as equally valuable. Whereas Stephen's intellectual inquiry is evident from conversations with peers in a library, Bloom's curiosity is apparent in domestic spaces such as the bedroom when he offers a definition of metempsychosis to his wife. He first tells her, "It's Greek: from the Greek. That means the transmigration of souls" (64). When Molly fails to understand this meaning, Bloom searches for an example with which to teach her and notices the artwork above their marriage bed: *Bath of the Nymph*. He then explains, "Metempsychosis ... is what the ancient Greeks called it. They used to believe you could be changed into an animal or a tree, for instance. What they called nymphs, for example" (65). In this scene, Bloom's abilities as an intellectual are on display. Not only does he recognize and comprehend a complicated philosophical concept but also he is able to scan his surroundings with the eye of an artist to discover the perfect way to articulate the meaning and convey it effectively to Molly.

Even though Bloom is often concerned with fulfilling his bodily needs for food and sex—in fact, this exchange with Molly is cut short when she smells his breakfast burning—he is also incredibly empathetic. He works to understand those around him, even animals. As he feeds the cat in "Calypso," he thinks, "They call them stupid. They understand what we say better than we understand them. She understands all she wants to. Vindictive too. Wonder what I look like to her" (55). This is one of the several instances in which Bloom expresses a desire to view himself from the perspective of others, and he does so by alluding to the Scottish poet Robert Burns' famous poem, "To a

Louse; on Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church" (1786). While observing the patrons of the Burton restaurant greedily dining in "Lestrygonians," Bloom thinks, "Am I like that? See ourselves as others see us" (169). Upon seeing a man that he had seen once before earlier in the day, Bloom speculates about why he is out and decides to "walk after him now make him awkward like those newsboys me today. Still you learn something. See ourselves as others see us" (375-6).

Stephen has a similar thought in "Telemachus" as he is talking with Buck Mulligan: "Stephen bent forward and peered at the mirror held out to him, cleft by a crooked crack. Hair on end. As he and others see me. Who chose this face for me?" (6). Neither Stephen nor Bloom can see himself objectively, but when they look into the mirror together in "Circe," Bloom is able to see clearly the way that Stephen sees him. Stephen is likewise able to see plainly the way that Bloom sees him. The mirror captures the exact moment of intersubjectivity, or shared understanding, between Bloom and Stephen. The joining of the "The Scientific. The Artistic" (U 683), represented by Bloom and Stephen respectively, can make the Dedalus of *Ulysses* a true artist. It's not that Bloom and Stephen fit into new father and son roles for one another. Their connection—both of them as creators—transcends any traditional family structure.

### **Misfits in Ireland**

Another way in which Stephen and Bloom work together as characters—not so much as symbolic father and son but as fellow fathers—is to convey meaning about what it means to be Irish in the early 20th century. Even casual readers of Joyce are aware of the author's complicated relationship to his native country, living most of his adult life outside Ireland, yet writing almost exclusively about it. American Critics such as Patrick

Colm Hogan and Jahan Ramazani among others assert that Joyce should be considered a “postcolonial” author.<sup>5</sup> Because the setting of the novel is 1904, eighteen years prior to the partition of Ireland in 1922, the text itself cannot, strictly speaking, be termed post-colonial. Joyce composed *Ulysses*, however, between 1914 and 1921, when the fight for Home Rule was at its peak. The Easter Rising occurred in 1916, the secessionist Sinn Fein Irish parliament was established in 1918, and the War for Independence (or Anglo-Irish War) lasted from 1919-1921. *Ulysses* was published in Paris one month prior to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty guaranteeing partial Irish independence for 26 of 32 Irish counties. Then, the Irish Civil War between the pro-treaty Provisional Government and the anti-treaty Irish Republican Army erupted, resulting in great loss of life. Given the level of national unrest at the time of its composition, Enda Duffy suggests we read *Ulysses* not only as a postcolonial text but as “*the* book of Irish postcolonial independence” (Duffy 3).

The novel does present anti-colonial views, and it aspires towards a post-colonial future. Joyce’s stream of consciousness style reveals cognizance of colonialism as a concept in the minds of characters. For instance, in the same way that a colonial subject feels regulated and controlled by a dominant colonial power, Stephen Dedalus feels monitored and restrained by the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. In the words of Agata Szczeszak-Brewer, the novel “offers a *Portrait* of the nation anticipating its postcolonial struggle for autonomy, self-sufficiency, and identity independent of the former colonial power and its dialectical rhetoric” (54). In terms of my theme of relations between sons and fathers, it might be said that in *Ulysses* the nation is depicted as a

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<sup>5</sup> See Patrick Colm Hogan’s *Empire and Poetic Voice: Cognitive and Cultural Studies of Literary Tradition and Colonialism* (2004) and Jahan Ramazani’s *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2001).



reluctant national son, anticipating freedom from a dominant, historically determined political father.

A nation serves as a home to its members, and Stephen and Bloom both find themselves significantly homeless for much of *Ulysses*. In “Telemachus,” Buck Mulligan takes the key to the tower, leaving Stephen displaced; Bloom, having left his key at home, wanders the Dublin streets. Homelessness, home and housing are a major theme of the novel. As with Homer’s *Odyssey*, homecoming is the dominant concern of the epic hero. Michael Tratner observes that Stephen and Bloom “are introduced largely by their ways of interacting with housing” (191). A significant difference, however, is that Stephen is happy to be free of social connections, but Bloom’s thoughts—suitable for the Odyssean hero—continually drift back home. He thinks of his wife, Molly, and with suppressed anguish he muses briefly on the imminent arrival of her lover, Blazes Boylan. In short, at the risk of oversimplification, Stephen wishes to be free of the social ties of social and familial life; Bloom desires acceptance into a nativist, indigenously monolithic, Roman Catholic society. In this respect they are very different. In Tratner’s words, “each [character] is frightened by the world in which the other wants to live” (191).

We may interpret the men’s relationship to their living quarters as symbolic of each man’s bond to his country. Each of the men is in his own way a “misfit” in Ireland. Having already been away, Stephen is now (in a sense) a visitor to his homeland—in many ways an outsider. Stephen considers himself a “servant”—as opposed to a citizen—of “the imperial British state” (*U* 20) as well as of the Holy Roman Empire, by which he means the Catholic Church and its establishment in the ecclesiastical institutions of

Ireland, including school, university and church. So as for the “nets” of nationality and religion from which Stephen wants to escape at the end of *Portrait*, he still finds himself entangled.

In episode 12 of *Ulysses*, “Cyclops,” Bloom is confronted with what David Fuller describes as “nationalist thuggery” (10) embodied by the character known as “the Citizen.” Linked to the mythological Cyclops and described in a mock epic fashion, the Citizen is one-eyed and closed-minded. Described by Enda Duffy as the “wild Irish Peasant” (98), he is based on Michael Cusack, a co-founder of the nationalist Gaelic Athletic Association, a cultural organization dedicated to the promotion of Irish and Gaelic sports, with clear links to political Home Rule and Sinn Fein movements. Its emphasis on Irish culture meant that for Joyce it was a target of criticism and was ripe for parody. Bloom is immediately cast as an outsider as the xenophobic and anti-Semitic narrator thinks “...those Jewies does have a sort of queer odour coming off them for dogs...” (304). Bloom chooses not to drink with the others, and the racist tone of the narration mocks Bloom’s contributions to the conversation. The speaker does not even listen to Bloom as he explains the natural phenomenon behind an executed man’s postmortem erection. (The contrast between the straight-faced intellectualism of Bloom and the xenophobic anti-intellectualism of the Citizen produces a particular type of strained comedy.) In fact, Bloom is made fun of for using the word “phenomen,” and the narrator refers to Bloom as Herr Professor Luitpold Blumenduft (304). The narrator perceives Bloom to be an intellectual, and his interaction with the Citizen is dramatized, punctuated with rain, thunder, and lightning. The narration, with its lists, evokes the Old Testament. Clearly, this episode is meant to parody the hero’s encounter, and eventual

escape from the monster Polyphemus, also known as the Cyclops, and this is one of many such monstrous encounters, which Bloom has to endure before he can return to his home and his wife.

Anti-Semitic feelings appear elsewhere in *Ulysses*: from Haines in the first episode and Deasy in the second, but Stephen is not receptive to these exclusionary ideas about Ireland. In “Cyclops,” Bloom is famously asked to define a nation:

—But do you know what a nation means? Says John Wyse.

—Yes, says Bloom.

—What is it? Says John Wyse.

—A nation? Says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.

(331)

In this exchange, Bloom makes clear that for him, national identity is based on civic inclusion. In 1904, Bloom and the Citizen are both legally British. As far as British or international law is concerned, an Irish nation-state is nonexistent (Fairhall 170). The Citizen, however, views his Irishness as in ethnic terms, based on shared ancestry. In his 1993 book, *James Joyce and the Question of History*, James Fairhall states that citizenship for a controlled group of people who would like to form a separate nation-state is equivalent to what Stephen’s defines paternity to be, “a legal fiction” (U 844; Fairhall 171). Bloom’s inclusion or exclusion in Dublin has little to do with where he was born or where he is able to vote. “The Citizen’s community is bound together by mystical ties of blood—especially the blood relationship of fathers and sons as a metaphor for the relationship between generations—and soil” (Fairhall 177). For the Citizen, it does not

matter how long Bloom has lived in his Ireland; it is his ancestry, the very blood in his veins, which precludes him for Irish inclusion.

### **The New Masculinity of Bloom**

Woven throughout the Citizen's disparagement of Bloom as an interloper in Ireland are taunts and sneers regarding his manliness. Although the Citizen's motives are likely centered on "othering" Bloom in as many ways as possible, some of his comments are rooted in truth. For example, he suggests that Bloom's children are not biologically his (338). While that isn't the case—his daughter Milly is now 16 years old and working in Mullingar, while Rudy died in childhood and is painfully remembered several times by Bloom—we as readers know, like Bloom, that Molly is expecting to pursue her extramarital affair that very day, in a tryst at Eccles Street with Blazes Boylan, her manager.

When we first meet Bloom in Episode 4, "Calypso," he is going about his morning routine at their home in 7, Eccles Street, in northwest Dublin (Gifford and Seidman 70). Bloom prepares breakfast for Molly (and for the cat) and performs domestic duties while the wife lies in bed. Whereas husbands in those days seldom cooked (labor for wives and servants), it is appropriate that this curious and resourceful man is willing and able to prepare a meal for his wife. It can be argued that his actions subvert typical gender roles of the time, and for some critics, indicate a measure of uxoriousness or subservience to his wife. It also stresses his kindness and allows Joyce an opportunity to explore Bloom's character in the context of the kitchen. Furthermore, Bloom's position as cuckolded husband is made evident—not only within Bloom's

internal monologue at various moments throughout the day but also as Molly reads Boylan's letter while Bloom is busy downstairs.

Bloom has occasional sexual fantasies of being literally sat upon or sexually used by women; he imagines Gerty sitting on him in "Nausicaa": "Like to be that rock she sat on" (376). "Also the library today: those girl graduates. Happy chairs under them" (376). He often objectifies women in his sexual fantasies. But on the other hand, he sometimes feels empathy with women, as when Bloom visits the National Maternity Hospital in Dublin. He seems able to feel the pain of the women in childbirth, and in the hallucinatory surrealism of Episode 15, "Circe," Bloom imagines that he delivers eight children. He says, "O, I want so want to be a mother" (494). It is important that Bloom expresses his desires to reproduce in bodily terms. As a man without a womb, he is obviously incapable of reproducing life by himself. Bloom does not seem to realize, as Stephen does, that men "must produce with their minds and mouths, namely thoughts and words" (Dundes 146). Bloom's empathy towards women outside the maternity hospital also works to establish Bloom as representative of a more modern, complex, and nuanced version of masculinity.

He is an amalgamation of new man and traditional man, of empathy for women but also of the objectifying male gaze. In his thoughts he can be impure and dirty, seeking only his own sexual satisfaction, but he can also be generous, sympathetic, and open-minded. He is an impure and complicated modernist hero, full of psychological complexity and competing impulses. He has the kind of complexity and detailed Portraiture that Joyce sought in his modern epic.<sup>6</sup> Bloom overtly rejects traditional

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<sup>6</sup> Martha Fodaski Black adds that Joyce gives Bloom "qualities that have been scripted as stereotypically feminine: [his] intuition, his hospitality, his personalism, his concern for familial

“tough guy” masculinity—showcased by Simon Dedalus on the adventure to Cork in *Portrait*. Fuller writes that nationalists like the Citizen “encourage militaristic sports, and, associated with these, narrow notions of manliness in support of which they police dissent with slurs of effeminacy and homosexuality” (62). Bloom expresses in “Ithaca” that he does not believe children should have militaristic toys, and he “looks away—as women are supposed to under patriarchy—from his mate’s adultery” (Black 71). I am arguing that this episode with the Cyclops highlights Bloom’s qualities as a new kind of man and an alternative to Stephen’s biological father. He is thus more open to Stephen’s intellectualism and outsider status than Stephen’s own father and can be seen as an avuncular friend on one hand and an alternative of symbolic father to Stephen on the other hand. Bloom’s characteristics are such a mix of what is traditionally viewed as masculine and feminine are so pronounced that the narrative of “Circe” pronounces him “a finished example of the new womanly man” (493).

### **Another Girl on the Beach: Gerty MacDowell**

Bloom’s intense encounter with the Citizen is followed with a masturbatory sexual experience on the beach as he observes Gerty MacDowell—a granddaughter of the Citizen—at Sandymount Strand. I view this scene in “Nausicaa” as a companion piece to Stephen Dedalus’s bird-girl epiphany in *Portrait*. The contrast between the two episodes is striking and reveals much about the difference between Stephen and Bloom but also about the difference between *Portrait* and *Ulysses*. Both men are engaging in what Freud termed scopophilia, and the language surrounding Gerty sometimes imitates language

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and human relationships, his nurturing benevolence, his pacifism and nonviolence, and his sensitivity to the loss of his spouse’s love, to the death of a friend, to the painful memory of his dead son” (71).

from the bird-girl scene: a bat flies “through the dusk, hither, thither, with a tiny lost cry” (U 363). It is no accident that the phrase “hither and thither” recurs multiple times in *Portrait*, always suggesting sexual restlessness and awakening associated with the restlessness of the developing protagonist.

In my reading, each scene is representative of the observer’s conception of art. A woman on a beach is easily recognizable as a moment captured by artists. See for example Botticelli’s well-known Portrait “The Birth of Venus” (1485), or in the modern period, Edvard Munch’s “Young Woman on the Beach” (1896) as well as the Pre-Raphaelite work of John William Waterhouse often depicting Tennyson’s Lady of Shalott or Shakespeare’s Ophelia near water. As each man observes the woman, he is momentarily an audience member, a reader of art. Thus the bird-girl epiphany and “Nausicaa” work together to provide a glimpse of how Stephen and Bloom can learn from another and expand one another’s conceptions of artistic expression.

First of all, both scenes employ the language of religion. The bird girl is a “wild angel (*Portrait* 156) and Gerty is “Mary, Star of the Sea” (U 346), an ancient title for the Virgin Mary. Stephen’s observation of the bird-girl marks his break with organized religion. He realizes that he can achieve a type of religious experience through art. However, while his feelings towards the girl are certainly sensuous, even sexual, his perception of her is elevated, as he combines the conventionally sexual, male gaze with the perspective of the aesthete and the spiritual quester. She is an otherworldly angel without flaws. She “felt his presence” and “suffered his gaze,” but otherwise ignored Stephen (155). In contrast to the bird-girl, Gerty is given a full internal monologue. She perceives Bloom’s scrutiny and describes him as “literally worshipping at her shrine”

(361). However he is not worshipping her directly. A shrine is considered holy only because of its associations with divinity or a sacred relic; it is only what Gerty represents that mesmerizes Bloom. What then does Gerty represent?

Mostly, Gerty represents manufactured beauty; she is “pinned together” (368), maintained with commercialized products like “iron jelloids” and “the Widow Welch’s female pills” (348). The whole of her interior monologue is written in the style of a cheap, romantic novel such as Gerty (and other women like her) might be expected to have read. Her ideas about herself and about men are formed by the romantic pulp fiction, which is her only literary amusement. Because she sees life as romance, she is vulnerable to exploitation by men. In this scene, Bloom is at his most degraded and despicable. Again, he may be an alternative father figure for Stephen, but he is not a consistently noble figure. Joyce painted all of his characters with raging impulses and impurities. Epic literature traditionally combines multiple writing styles, and in this scene, Joyce weds the language of teenage commercial romance with the complexity of Bloom’s exploitative narrative.

Gerty is attractive, but she works hard to achieve her looks: using makeup to shape her eyebrows, having her hair cut and paring her fingernails. The blue that Gerty wears carries a different connotation than the blue skirts of the bird girl. Gerty has been advised to wear electric blue by the *Lady’s Pictorial* (350). While the bird-girl gazes out onto the natural beauty of the sea, Gerty admires manmade fireworks. Bloom’s perception of Gerty, and thus his perception of art, is an appreciation of the real world with all of its imperfections and artificiality. Gerty is authentic in that she knows Bloom is watching her, and she enjoys the attention. She is not portrayed as a virginal, idealized



woman, blissfully unaware of the lust she may provoke in men. She knows what Bloom is up to. She has been in love before and has experienced heartbreak. Whereas Stephen's bird-girl remains mysterious, an entire narrative is provided for Gerty, connecting her to her community. Her father is an abusive alcoholic (354). Her lameness emphasizes her physicality, and she thinks about the biological functions of her body. Specifically, she senses the onset of her menstruation, and Bloom—who as we have seen is keen to empathize with women—correctly infers the fact.

Near the end of "Nausicaa," Bloom begins to write a message in the sand: "I Am A....," but he doesn't finish (381). This message would be a declaration of identity, but it is left incomplete, indicating that Bloom is going through a process of self-discovery not unlike Stephen's.<sup>7</sup> He and Stephen both have to negotiate their relationship to Ireland and how they will make meaning of their lives. Bloom comments, "No room. Let it go" (381). Perhaps there is no room for someone like him in Ireland. The message in the sand is transient; "All fades" (381). Bloom, like Stephen, is concerned about his lasting impact on the world—what it will be and how it will endure. One way that Bloom could ensure his legacy is through a son, and he remembers little Rudy many times throughout *Ulysses*—his son who died eleven days after birth. For example in episode 11, "Hades," Bloom thinks, "Last of his name and race. I too, last my race. Milly young student. Well, my fault perhaps. No son. Rudy. Too late now. Or if not? If not? If still? (285). Here we can see Bloom's concern that his surname will not be carried on by a son. He does acknowledge his living daughter, Milly, but in keeping with the custom of primogeniture, which passes wealth and property to the first legitimate son, Bloom worries about his

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<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of episode 3, "Proteus," Stephen walks along Sandymount Strand and thinks "Signatures of all things I am here to read..." (37). This line can be read as foreshadowing that Stephen will "read" the incompleteness of Bloom and gain valuable insight from the interaction.

legacy. He wonders if it is too late to conceive another child—hopefully a male—with his wife.

It is clear that Bloom would love to have a living son and indeed several of his interactions with Stephen can be interpreted as “fatherly.” John Gross reminds us that we can’t take the surrogate father and son relationship between Bloom and Stephen too literally as Bloom is only 38 and therefore too young to really be Stephen’s father, and Stephen is nearing the age when he would be thinking about becoming a father himself (48). Harkness comments, “Joyce and Bloom’s realism denies any literal father-son relationship” (190). So many readings of *Ulysses* discuss Bloom as Stephen’s new father figure, that Bloom’s role as a son is sometimes overlooked. Bloom’s father, Rudolph, committed suicide in 1886, and the death is described with the detail of an inquest in “Ithaca.” Thurston writes, “Bloom’s recollection of his father is tangled up with a dense cluster of anxieties provoked by the undermining of the institution of paternity—above all, anxieties to do with sexual identity, conjugal rights and property” (176-77). Bloom and Stephen are both living without their fathers but for very different reasons. They are also described as children at times (Fuller 68). For example, in “The Lotus Eaters,” Lyons thinks that Bloom is giving him a gambling tip, but he is not. It is a mistake that calls to mind an important scene in *Portrait* where Stephen has a misunderstanding with a teacher about not having his glasses. In both instances, Bloom and Stephen have difficulty being understood; their motives raise questions in the minds of others. A lack of clear communication with members of their community contributes to their outsider status.

In his Paris notebook, Joyce quoted a sentence from Aristotle: “The most natural act for living beings which are complete is to produce other beings like themselves and thereby to participate as far as they may in the eternal and divine” (Richard Ellmann 204). Outside the maternity hospital in episode 14, “Oxen of the Sun” Bloom and Stephen seem aware of the sacred, religious importance of the situation while the other men discuss political aspects of birth like contraception.

The final moment that I will discuss that I believe supports my reading of Stephen and Bloom as fellow artists occurs in Episode 15, “Circe,” when Bloom and Stephen look into a mirror together. Mirrors carry significance in *Portrait*, especially between Stephen and Simon. In the opening, Simon tells a story to young Stephen and rather than look at the child directly, he views him through a “glass” or monocle. While a mirror is typically used to view oneself, it provides a form of mediated perception just like the lens through which Simon examines his son. As Annalisa Volpone states, the glass is “symbolically positioned between his eye and that of Stephen” preventing eye contact between father and son. The indirect gaze suggests an arbitrated observation and “may hint at the irreconcilable distance between the two, which will later characterize their relationship” (Volpone 142). By the time Stephen and Bloom gaze into the mirror together in the surreal, hallucinatory atmosphere of Mrs. Cohen’s brothel, there is no such distance between them.

### **Circe and Shakespeare**

Episode 15, “Circe” is the longest episode of *Ulysses*, described by Enda Duffy as the “grand phantasmagoria of the book” (11). Stephen’s hallucinations and Bloom’s hallucinations mingle into one another, suggesting that “Circe” comes from the

subconscious of the novel, not from individual characters. Identities are not stable in this episode; past and present affect one another. As I will show, “Circe” is the realization of the connection between Stephen and Bloom. Not only are they linked with one another but also with Shakespeare (Kain 154). “Bloom—with all he presents—and Stephen—with all he represents—must, together, look into the mirror to ‘produce’ Shakespeare” (Harkness 181).

First, let us look at how Joyce uses mirrors in other sections of *Ulysses*. In the first episode, “Telemachus,” Stephen sees his reflection and thinks, “As he and others see me. Who chose this face for me?” (6). Stephen’s inquiry shows that he desires to see through the eyes of others, to explore different perspectives—a skill that a thoughtful artist must master. Furthermore, his questioning of “who chose this face for me?” suggests that he does not feel fully in control of his life at this point. If a face could be chosen, Stephen wants to choose it himself.

Stephen’s identity (his image) has so far been defined by others, and he goes on to tell Buck Mulligan, “It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant” (6). Here, Stephen is criticizing the art of his country, implying that the Irish people are unable to see themselves clearly. The means by which they might be able to understand themselves are unavailable. Joyce uses the image of a mirror<sup>8</sup> in this same way in a letter to publisher Grant Richards, “It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass” (qtd. in Ellmann 222). From these

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<sup>8</sup> For more on how literature, up until the Romantic period, was understood as mimesis, a representation or imitation of reality, see M. H. Abrams’ *The Mirror and the Lamp; a Study of the Transition to Romantic Theories of Poetry and Criticism* (1953).

examples, we can see that Joyce is using the idea of a mirror to both question the role of art and appraise the value of art coming out of his home country.

The significance of Shakespeare is established seven episodes earlier in “Scylla and Charybdis,” wherein Stephen presents his theory on Shakespeare at the National library. As Odysseus was trapped between Scylla, a six-headed monster, and Charybdis, a whirlpool, Stephen seems trapped in a battle of literary debate. On the one hand, he seeks approval from his audience, representative of the older generation, comprised of John Eglinton (W.K. Magee), Lyster, and A.E. (George Russell). On the other hand, Stephen is impatient with what he views as the worn-out ideas of the Irish Literary Renaissance.

Stephen’s theory of Shakespeare is an autobiographical, psychoanalytic reading of Hamlet, asserting that the character most representative of Shakespeare is the Ghost—Hamlet’s father. The artist then is the father, cuckolded by a brother and Anne Hathaway, victimized by his family, and eager for his progeny to seek revenge. Stephen bases his interpretation on biographical details of Shakespeare’s life. For example, Shakespeare had a son named Hamnet who died at the age of 11, and Shakespeare was grieving his father’s death when he composed the play. “This ‘autobiographical’ view is built up out of a host of facts, half-facts, legends and conjectures, a kind of amalgam of history and speculation which appears to have been a staple element of popular Shakespeariana in Joyce’s time” (Scofield 60). In fact, Richard Ellmann shows that Joyce’s theory on Hamlet—about which he gave lectures in Trieste—closely aligns with Stephen’s (155).<sup>9</sup> As might be expected, Stephen’s audience warns him about relying too heavily on biographical information in his interpretation. Perhaps most adamant in his disagreement

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<sup>9</sup> Ellmann writes, “It was on [June 16, 1904], or at least during the month of June, that [Joyce] began to work out his theory that Shakespeare was not prince Hamlet but Hamlet’s father, betrayed by Anne Hathaway with his brother” (155).

is A.E. (George Russell) who pushes the “art for art’s sake” aestheticism of the 1890s. A.E. argues that Art is pure but biography (real life) is not pure (189).

Stephen does not appear to hold to his theory with much conviction. When Eglinton asks Stephen if he believes his own theory, he responds “promptly” that he does not (*U* 213), a response that leads Martin Scofield to describe the tone of Stephen’s theory as “weary flippancy” (62). It could be that Stephen is mocking literary criticism of the day, or it could be that is trying to determine the motivational source behind the composition of Shakespeare’s most revered tragedy.

As previously discussed, the Stephen of *Portrait* is flooded with emotion when studying the carved word of “Foetus” in Simon’s former classroom. Stephen recognizes that the word itself is more powerful than the tales of his father when it comes to sparking the imagination. The inspiration Stephen gains from the bird girl epiphany marks his break with the Catholic Church; he realizes that the confines of religion are not conducive to his creative efforts. Rather, he must look to the spirituality of the natural world. The Stephen of *Ulysses* is now deeply enmeshed in his theory of Shakespeare, working hard to understand the creative process behind The Bard’s success.

The theory that Stephen delivers closely follows his attitude towards fatherhood. If the playwright did not write Hamlet until his father died, then perhaps Stephen is justified in his rejection of Simon. Karen Lawrence writes that “Fathers are most useful in their absence; the death of the father initiates the action of the son, who both memorializes and replaces his father, rendering him unnecessary” (Lawrence 236). The beliefs of Stephen in *Portrait* may have aligned more with A.E.’s belief in the transcendent power of art. Now, Stephen is more grounded in the “real.” Stephen’s

spiritual connection to Bloom, which is elucidated through the visions of “Circe,” lead him to see the “real” in the “ideal,” and “bodily” in the “human.”

The intellectual sparring that takes place between Stephen and his audience in the National Library may seem far removed from the less elevated conversation of Bloom and the ordinariness of Bloom’s day in Dublin. However, important links remain between Stephen and Bloom. For example, Hugh Kenner points out “how Bloom-like a Shakespeare Stephen succeeds in imagining: a restless man with a lively daughter and a dead son, uneasily yoked to a wife who ‘overbore’ him once and cuckolds him now, rearranging all this difficult experience in a steady flow of words” (114). Stephen gets his first glimpse of Bloom in the library as he is discussing Hamlet, and in the stream of consciousness narrative revealing Bloom’s inner thoughts, Bloom often references Shakespeare. For instance, Bloom remembers the gravediggers in Hamlet as he ruminates on bodily deterioration at the funeral of Paddy Dignam in “Hades.” According to William Peery’s count, “Joyce in *Ulysses* refers or alludes to Shakespeare or his words, or quotes from the latter, 321 times—once every other page. Of these 321 references, 107—exactly one-third—are to Hamlet. Forty-nine of the 107 are more or less evenly distributed throughout *Ulysses*; the other 58 are concentrated in the thirty-three pages of the Scylla and Charybdis episode” (109). It is significant that many of the Shakespearean references can be found in the interior monologue of Bloom as well as in the conversation of Stephen.

Given the importance of Shakespeare at numerous points in *Ulysses*, it makes sense that this preeminent figure of Western literature is the visage that unites Bloom and Stephen. The specifics of the vision validate this interpretation. Shakespeare is wearing

antlers, which suggests cuckolding. Bloom is literally a cuckold, and this image matches with Stephen's interpretation of Shakespeare in "Scylla and Charybdis" (Harkness 172). Fuller explains, "Shakespeare is 'the father of all his race'; he has played a part in forming England's consciousness of itself, as Stephen wishes to do for Ireland" (50). At this critical moment in history, the artist's conception of Ireland's consciousness is necessarily complicated. Bloom and Stephen are two people with many differences, and Michael Tratner argues that their interaction "enacts the crucial goal of hybridity theory: bringing two parts of one nation to recognize their differences, accept them simply as differences, and mix them together until there is no longer a possibility of one part oppressing the other" (124).

If "Circe" can be read as a joining of Bloom and Stephen, "Ithaca" is the consummation. This, the penultimate episode, begins with the line: "What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning?" (666). The trajectories of Stephen and Bloom are "parallel"—running beside one another with the same distance between them. They are described as equals, unlike father and son. When Joyce employs a spoonerism to intermingle their names, "Stoom" and "Blephen" bring together the "two temperaments" they "individually represent:" "The scientific. The artistic" (*U* 683). One of the best terms I have encountered to describe the relationship between Stephen and Bloom is used by Marguerite Harkness in the conclusion to her 1984 monograph, *The Aesthetics of Dedalus and Bloom*: "rapprochement," to bring together as in international relations. Bloom, in fatherly fashion, makes cocoa for himself and Stephen and offers to let Stephen wash, but he declines. The care with which the beverage is prepared, served, and consumed likens it to a form of communion (*U* 677). The cocoa, however, is cheap



and ordinary, unlike wine that is normally associated with Holy Communion. Harkness describes it as “unity achieved through the mundane” (192). As Stephen takes his leave from the Bloom residence, he and Bloom urinate together, “their sides contiguous, their organs of micturition reciprocally rendered invisible by manual circumposition” (702). Their urination is in the words of David Fuller, “a very Joycean affirmation of communion” (83). Throughout *Ulysses*, it is made clear that Bloom loves water and Stephen hates it; he specifically dislikes washing. So Stephen and Bloom “making water” together is both intimate and representative of their differing but complementary attributes.

As Declan Kiberd observes in *Inventing Ireland*, “At the core of Joyce’s art is the belief that fathers and sons are brought together more by genetic accident than by mutual understanding, and that most sons are compelled to rebel” (382). Dissatisfied with the genetic accident of being born to Simon Dedalus, Stephen does in fact rebel and seek mutual understanding with Bloom, but his connection to Bloom is complex and cannot be simplified as a new, more fulfilling father and son relationship. Joyce uses the concept of the father and son relationship to comment upon how personal identity formation is fostered and how an artist may best learn to convey culture. James Joyce’s brother, Stanislaus, wrote

In Ireland, a country which has seen revolutions in every generation, there is properly speaking no national tradition. [...] When an Irish artist begins to write, he has to create his moral world from chaos by himself, for himself. Yet, though this is an enormous disadvantage for a host of writers of good average talent, it

proves to be an enormous advantage for men of original genius, such as Shaw, Yeats, or my brother. (185)

Although Stephen Dedalus is only partially an autobiographical version of Joyce, we see in *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the endeavors of a young man in an anticolonial context to acquire an artistic voice—a unique voice developed through independent thought and intellectual inquiry—that will invent Ireland’s great national epic, which as foreshadowed in “Scylla and Charybdis,” is “yet to be written” (192).

## INTERCHAPTER

My reading of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* is positioned at the beginning of this study about fathers and sons and national identity because of the historical context of both novels. Written during the first two decades of the twentieth century in Ireland, just prior to partition in 1922, both texts feature anticolonial views in anticipation of the Irish Free State. Joyce experiments with narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness that invite readers deep into the minds of characters, revealing the psyche of the colonized subject.

As an early modernist text, *Portrait* combines time-honored literary features with new innovations. It is now widely considered as belonging to the Bildungsroman genre, the first of which was *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1795-96). One of the earliest critics to refer to *Portrait* as a Bildungsroman, Harry Levin, writes, "The theme of [Joyce's] novel is the formation of character; its habitual pattern is that of apprenticeship or educational and it falls into that category which has been distinguished, by German criticism at least, as the Bildungsroman" (41). Indeed, *Portrait* includes many components of a traditional "novel of education." Stephen's artistic quest to give voice to his nation is largely shaped by institutions that wield hegemonic authority—establishments such as schools and churches. As a literary character, Stephen is developed in institutional settings. He is a student in *Portrait* and a teacher in *Ulysses*. But the schools and power structures in Ireland at the time function, at least in part, to reinforce British sovereignty. Irish poet and critic Seamus Deane explains that "Stephen feels the threat of his borrowed culture when it seeks to co-opt him, when it tries to recruit him into its system of institutionalized borrowing, either through the

vocation of the priesthood or through a commitment to Irish nationalism” (qtd. in Castle 163). Stephen, always the independent thinker, recognizes the risk of becoming deeply enmeshed in the Roman Catholic Church. Such a commitment would require a sacrifice of his artist agency. This is a risk that Stephen Dedalus is unwilling to take, made evident in his thinking of “non serviam: I will not serve” (211).

The very language that Stephen uses to denounce religion is a Latin phrase drawn from the biblical story. The phrase is ascribed to the rebel angel Lucifer in his denouncement of God. In this way, Stephen uses the devices of authority (biblical language) to dissent from that very authority (the church). Likewise, as an Irish subject of the British Empire, his native tongue is English—an instrument of authority deployed in colonial rule. Stephen, like his creator Joyce, will use that very tool to represent the Irish people in literature.

In keeping with the conventions of the Bildungsroman, Stephen diverges from the path presented by his parents. But Simon Dedalus, the father that Stephen rejects, is not merely a father; he is a symbol of authority. Gerald Peters writes, “As in the traditional process of Bildung, a transcendental signifier of cultural authority (i.e., the father) must be invoked at some point in order to ground the identity of self within the artificial womb of culture” (67). In breaking with his father, Stephen is also choosing to step outside of institutions he views as oppressive. The means by which Joyce expresses his character’s motivations, however, are not typical. The narrative structure of the text allows the reader to experience Stephen’s growth and maturity in a new way. While the majority of the text is presented with third-person narration, Joyce uses free indirect style, “which moves towards deep and full entry into a character’s consciousness, yet cannot abandon

altogether the authority of the author's own voice" (Stevenson 35-6). Finally, in the last six pages, Stephen gains his own voice, and first-person narration in the form of his diary entries ends the novel. Without this form of delivery, readers might never understand the full impact of scenes like the one with the tundish. Stephen's reflection on that moment in his diary—"That tundish has been on my mind for a long time" (222)—reveals the incident's lasting impression. And his assessment of the Dean of Studies, "Damn him one way or the other!" (222), exposes Stephen's anger and disillusionment.

Joyce takes his experimentation with literary form further in *Ulysses*, famously commenting, "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality" (Ellmann 521). Holding all of those puzzles together, however, is a very familiar myth: Homer's *Odyssey*. As T.S. Eliot wrote in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (1923), "In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him" (177). The story of Odysseus guides the structure of *Ulysses* and highlights the importance of Stephen's relationship with Bloom because of its parallels with Telemachus' relationship with Odysseus. The cacophony of voices and sounds, disembodied thoughts, allusions to popular culture as well as high literature that make up the text of *Ulysses* are all tethered to one classic, epic work. "It is simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot 177). As Stephen works to fulfill his destiny as an author, looking to the future in an ever-changing world, Simon ties him to the past, to Ireland, as subjugated by the British Empire.

Although written well before the rise of postcolonial discourse in literary criticism, *Portrait* and *Ulysses* present a character worthy of postcolonial analysis. In Stephen Dedalus, Joyce created a “hybrid” many decades before postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha began discussing cultural identity in such terms. According to Bhabha, hybridity is a mixing of cultures that occurs in a “third space,” a place of possibility “in which cultural meanings and identities always contain the traces of other meanings and identities” (Ashcroft et al. 53-4). Stephen Dedalus is born and raised in Ireland. As such, his nationality is never called into question, but his allegiance to cultural markers such as the English language and the Roman Catholic Church is haunted by the shadow of British imperialism. He is Irish, but he does not accept any artificiality or romanticized notions of what Ireland once was. Stephen decides that he can only fully come to terms with his Irishness if he removes himself from Ireland.

Stephen desires to exile himself, to “fly by those nets”—meaning the nets of nationality, religion, and language. Eugene O’Brien points out the double meaning in the phrasing of “fly by those nets.” The word “by” can mean “around” or “past,” but it also means “by means of” or “using as an aid” (O’Brien 225). Even if one bypasses the nets, he must take them into consideration. In the words of O’Brien, “to be inside these nets it to be delimited by past concepts of nationality, language, and religion. To bypass them, or to use them to move on, is to be open to a future that will, while taking on board some of the baggage of the past, travel to new destinations, redefining itself in the process” (225).

The literary sons examined in the next two chapters share with Stephen Dedalus the experience of simultaneously belonging and not belonging in his nation of birth.

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* is also a Bildungsroman and centers on Karim Amir's coming of age. My exploration of Zadie Smith's work considers Magid and Millat Iqbal of *White Teeth* and Alex Li-Tandem in *The Autograph Man*. Unlike *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the latter texts analyzed in this project were written in the midst of postcolonial discourse with a self-conscious awareness of their contribution to what has come to be known as "Black British Literature." Kureishi and Smith are often discussed together. They share biographical similarities as Kureishi was born to a Pakistani father and a white British mother, and Smith has a white British father and a Jamaican mother. Their novels are often understood as representative of the Black British experience, and critics frequently explore *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *White Teeth* in tandem. For instance, Sezgi Oztop (2015) writes that the two novels work to "establish a space for self-identification in spite of the racist attitudes by rejecting the fixity of cultural, racial and national identity since such identities are flexible constructs to be altered and rejected" (292). Oztop touches on how Haroon Amir influences his son, Karim, and mentions Smith's Samad Iqbal, but the two novels are not presented as sharing an exploration of father and son relationships. I assert that the use of the filial relationship is a critical connection to make between these two contemporary authors just as it is an important connection to make with Joyce writing decades earlier as his nation was on the cusp of independence. My reading of novels from all three authors show that the filial relationship is a useful site for which authors to work out ideas about the formation of national identity in complex, modern societies.

In her 2015 introduction to *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which has since been republished in her 2018 collection of essays, *Feel Free*, Zadie Smith observes the

“strange relationship that can exist between first-generation immigrants and their children” (239). The first-generation father carries with him cultural beliefs and traditions that the second-generation son can never fully understand. The son is faced with a choice—to accept the father’s version of national identity or to grapple with his own complexities and forge a new path.

My interpretation of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *White Teeth*, and *The Autograph Man* suggests that the figure of the father is moved or placed differently in postcolonial texts. In Joyce’s early twentieth century novels, Simon Dedalus is firmly positioned as representative of what Stephen wants to reject. Simon is weak. He has failed to succeed just as Ireland has, in Joyce’s view, failed to assert itself in the face of British rule. Simon appears from time to time in *Ulysses*, but Stephen has completely moved on. He does not desire to offer aid to his father; rather, he is disgusted by Simon’s ineptness. As power dynamics shifted throughout the twentieth century and what the father represented changed, the representation of fathers in literature necessarily shifted as well. Kureishi’s and Smith’s fathers are not wholly representative of an older generation or the homeland. Their identities are in flux; they have the lived experience of hybridity.

My close reading of works by Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith presented in the following two chapters suggests that in urban environments where multiculturalism has resulted from the fall of the British Empire, the divide between fathers and sons—the older generation and the younger generation—is not clear cut. In postcolonial cultures, where boundaries between nationalities and ethnicities are blurred, even generational differences are unstable, distorted to the point that a first-generation, Bengali-English father like Samad Iqbal is driven to invent distinct divisions between his foundational



culture and his current environment. Even the youthful Alex Li-Tandem seeks to compartmentalize competing aspects of his identity in an effort to understand his own complexity. My analysis will show that these contrivances, rooted in the relationship between father and son, are destined to fail.

## CHAPTER 2: FATHER AND SON RELATIONSHIPS IN HANIF KUREISHI'S *THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA*

Hanif Kureishi's essay on the process of writing, "Something Given: Reflections on Writing," begins with two words that I believe are critical to understanding Kureishi's work, "My father." He says that his father wanted him to become a writer and goes on to explain how his father taught him persistence in the craft through example. It is no surprise then that father and son relationships are a recurrent theme in Hanif Kureishi's work, both in print and on screen. His 2004 memoir, *My Ear at His Heart*, recounts his experience of coming to know his father, Shannoo, as a fellow writer by reading one of his unpublished and unfinished novels. As Shannoo Kureishi was a Pakistani immigrant to England, the question of national identity naturally arises in the son's reflections. Hanif writes of his father, "Dad never attempted to become an Englishman; that was impossible. But he did join in the English way of life" (*My Ear at His Heart*, 80). This quotation indicates an important distinction; "joining in" or participating in the lifestyle typical of the English is different from actually transforming into someone who identifies as English. While some may consider one's "national identity" a simple declaration of where one was born or in what nation one was raised, "national identity" is a socially-constructed sense of belonging to a nation—a sense of connection that will necessarily differ between an immigrant parent and a second-generation son or daughter.

The ways in which the question of national identity can complicate father and son relationships pervade Kureishi's fiction. His 1985 Oscar-nominated screenplay, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, depicts young Omar caring for his physically ill and perpetually drunken "Papa." The British-Pakistani father, Hussein, desperately wants an education and prosperous future for his son. Omar is essentially given to his uncle—a new father

figure—for whom the young man works at menial tasks such as car washing. These occupations culminate in Omar’s ownership of the launderette and his break with the uncle’s tyrannical authority. In addition to illustrating Omar’s “coming-of-age,” the film raises questions of national identity for non-white immigrants in twentieth century London. Omar’s struggles for societal acceptance are further exasperated by his homosexuality. Omar and his lover, Johnny, are interracial as well as gay, making their relationship doubly subversive in the dominant culture of 1985 England. Anindyo Roy argues that Kureishi articulates marginalized race and sexuality as parallel in his films (131). Omar is considered an “other” because of his skin color, and his sexuality goes against the mainstream as well. Kureishi continues to weave threads among socially perceived “deviant” sexuality, the question of national identity, and father and son relationships in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. This 1990 novel, Kureishi’s most popular work of fiction to date, is the Bildungsroman of Karim Amir. It won the Whitbread Award for Best First Novel published in 1990 and has since been translated into at least twenty languages.

While young Karim is undoubtedly the novel’s protagonist, Haroon, Karim’s father, is the eponymous character. Haroon’s best friend, Anwar, does not have a son but pressures his daughter—whom he perceives as overly-Westernized—to marry the Indian man of his choosing. Anwar’s unfulfilled expectations of his son-in-law, Changez, make up an important subplot that underscores complex paternal relationships as the novel’s primary theme. Furthermore, these multi-faceted father and son relationships elucidate the problem of national and cultural identity in postcolonial England, particularly for people of color. Karim—whose name may have been derived from Rudyard Kipling’s

Kim, an orphaned character similarly caught between Eastern and Western identities—witnesses and often participates in the identities that his father creates for himself by way of language modification and public performance. As Karim matures, he acknowledges his father's influence and simultaneously attempts to assert himself (I will argue, unsuccessfully) as an individual, separate from Haroon's guidance. All the while, even as he tries out substitute father figures, Karim's status as a biracial, bisexual suburbanite solidifies him as a new kind of Englishman—in Karim's words, "...a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed..." (*Buddha* 3).

### **"A Funny Kind of Englishman"**

*Buddha* is widely considered to be a Bildungsroman, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "a novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person." Kureishi's choice to contribute to this genre is significant because "it is one which insistently presents identity as a developmental, unstable and shifting process, rather than a given and stable product" (Moore-Gilbert 127). The complex process that Karim goes through to define his identity is made clear in the novel's opening passage:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care—Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it's enough to say

that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don't know why. Quite frankly, it was getting me down and I was ready for anything. (3)

These initial words asserted by Karim in first-person narration are a declaration of his given name, which suggests that he values and embraces his unique identity. According to Kent Baxter, however, the proper name is not the son's alone. It is also a "central symbol of the father and son relationship" (217). Motherhood is made clear through an unquestionable bodily connection with the child, but as Freud notes in "Family Romances," "paternity is always uncertain" (238). Giving a child the father's name is a way of legally establishing paternity. Thus, even though Karim does not mention his father directly in this introduction, Haroon's presence is implied in the family name.

Secondly, Karim pronounces his nationality, not his race. The first sentence states that he was born and raised (or "bred") in England. Importantly, he describes himself as English rather than British, which perhaps connects his identity to a more modern version of the country while avoiding the imperial connotations of Great Britain. It is only later in the paragraph that Karim mentions "blood" and alludes to his "odd mixture of continents." In this passage, Karim seems to be claiming for himself what Homi Bhabha would call a "third space of enunciation"—a state of hybridity (37). These lines have been interpreted "as a kind of mission statement by those critics keen to stress the celebratory aspects of hybrid fusion" (Nasta 199). But Kureishi includes many qualifying words like "almost," "some," and "perhaps," which may reveal Karim's anxieties and weaken his credibility (Nasta 199).

Irrespective of race or nationality, readers of this passage can easily recognize the common plight of all adolescents. All teenagers experience Karim's feelings of "belonging and not belonging"; all teenagers become "restless" and find themselves "easily bored." The typical teenage angst expressed in the passage calls some of Karim's assertions into question. For example, he says he "doesn't care" about his "two old histories;" and he is "not proud of" being an Englishman. Do we really believe him? What is Karim really saying about his identity in these oft-quoted, introductory lines?

In "Sex and Sexuality," his introduction to *Collected Screenplays 1* (2002), Kureishi states, "A child is a cocktail of its parent's desires. Being a child at all involves resolving, or synthesizing, at least two different worlds, outlooks and positions"(qtd. in Thomas 121). This is particularly true of Karim as his mother is English and his father is Indian. Throughout *Buddha*, Karim inhabits liminal spaces between traditional, binary definitions. Karim is almost an Englishman. His nickname throughout the novel is "Creamy," a color that calls to mind Bhabha's notion of "not quite/ not white" (Bhabha 92). Karim is not heterosexual, nor does he fully embrace homosexuality; rather, he is bisexual. He says, "It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as girls" (55). He does not live within the city limits of London; nor does he live in the country. As the title suggests, much of the novel's action occurs in the suburbs—in the "in-between" space. Although Kureishi sets up these dualities, Karim never sees himself in these terms and never makes a choice on a dichotomous level (Brancato 59). Kureishi's twentieth-century Bildungsroman modifies the genre such that it does not "follow a trajectory that brings a final identity" (Brancato 65). Rather, the protagonist's identity shifts according to his social context. As Bhabha writes, "It is the 'inter'—the

cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha 38).

Taken as a whole, *Buddha* suggests that the only form of identity capable of survival in 1970s England is a hybrid one—an identity that Karim learns to perform from his father. I will present a wider application of Judith Butler’s theory that cultural identity is linked to dominant discourses and power. Butler’s theory of “performative construction” indicates that behaviors are not natural; rather, they are learned, socially constructed, and socially enforced. My analysis of *Buddha* will show that Karim acquires significant lessons about language and performance from his father and even credits his father with that authority and control. The aforementioned subplot of Anwar and Changez—father-in-law and son-in-law—demonstrates the extremes of Western and Eastern lifestyles. It is these extremes, with focus on racial purity and cultural essentialism, that cannot endure, as the England of *Buddha*’s time is moving into the multiculturalism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Father and Son: Growing Up Together**

Readers of *Buddha* meet Haroon immediately after Karim’s introduction as he enters the family home. He utters the first command of the novel, which is also the first spoken line: “Fetch the pink towel” (3). Wendy O’Shea-Maddour reads this imperative as “adherence to a nonconformist model of masculinity, one that is confirmed by Karim’s acknowledgment that Haroon ‘taught’ his son ‘to flirt with everyone’ he met, ‘girls and boys alike’” (44-45). Haroon showers both of his sons and his wife with affection in this opening scene. He kisses all of them “with enthusiasm” (3). Yet, “instead of flopping into a chair to watch the television news and wait for Mum to put the warmed-up food on the

table,” he goes into the bedroom declaring that he “must practice” (3). He has been studying books on Buddhism, Sufism, Confucianism, and Zen. He costumes himself in stereotypical “oriental” garb and makes house calls to paying customers who ask him “to speak on one or two aspects of Oriental philosophy” (5).

Kureishi’s presentation of Haroon as an affectionate father who quickly bypasses his family in order to prepare for his impending performance is significant. Karim learns from his father to value the performative. On the second page of the novel, Karim observes his father “standing on his head ... balanced perfectly” (4). David Crackanthorpe asserts, “In physical description of the father, a son’s attention often seems, perhaps for some unknowable phylogenetic reason, to be concentrated on the head” (27). To make his case, Crackanthorpe presents evidence from Edmund Gosse (an author referred to by Karim in *Buddha*), John Buchan, and Evelyn Waugh. The depiction of Haroon standing on his head, with his stomach sagging and genitals flopping forward, is humorous and suggests that Haroon is incapable of presenting a traditional, straightforward image of himself as the “head” of the family. Kenneth C. Kaleta claims, “The description of Haroon’s headstand ... is paradoxical in tone. It ridicules the suburban and the enlightened: it embraces and lashes out at stereotypes of Suburbia, race, and family” (69). Haroon’s headstand does seem to represent an inversion of conventional, fatherly leadership. Instead of focusing on his “day job” and providing an image of suburban conformity for his son to embrace, Haroon reinvents himself; he dresses in a costume and sells to English residents an image of Eastern philosophy, which the English people have themselves created. Haroon appropriates colonial tropes and stereotypes, and regardless of his position as a “spiritual guide” to white patrons, Karim knows the truth—that his



father “stumble[s] around the [the South London suburbs] like an Indian just off the boat” (7).

Although Karim is embarrassed by many of his father’s social habits, he subconsciously fills the figurative shoes that Haroon provides. In this first chapter, Haroon and Karim interact with one another like pals of the same age. Karim reads to Haroon from *Yoga for Women*; “yoga” means to link, unite, or to put under the same yoke (Yousaf 46). After helping his father prepare for his “appearance,” the duo stop in a pub for a drink, and then arrive at the engagement. A few weeks later, Haroon invites his son to another appearance, asking, “You’re excited, eh?” (22). Karim responds shyly in the affirmative, and Haroon says, “And I like having you with me, boy. I love you very much. We’re growing up together, we are” (22). The affectionate intimacy conveyed in this passage (and others like it) is one of the qualities Zadie Smith most appreciates about *The Buddha of Suburbia*. In a 2015 introduction to the novel, Smith writes, “I owe a lot, both personally and professionally, to Kureishi’s account of the strange relationship that can exist between first-generation immigrants and their children” (*Feel Free* 239). She goes on to describe the relationship as “psychologically acute” (239); the teenager growing up alongside the father who is growing into his full identity in a new country is a “beautiful, painful way to put it” (Smith 239).

Haroon and Karim’s rapport resembles one of sociologist Lewis Yablonsky’s five basic types of father styles: “peer-type fathers or buddies” (66). Yablonsky describes these fathers as men that “do not perceive themselves as superordinate to anyone, or capable of controlling anyone” (66). They are frequently emotionally immature and often burden their sons with their own adult problems (Yablonsky 66). Haroon has struggled

for much of his life to be accepted into English society. By participating in the current social system, Haroon has become a subject indoctrinated with the social norms and cultural expectations of that system. By taking his son along with him to his speaking engagement as a spiritual guru, Haroon exposes Karim to his performance of the Oriental. With his actions as well as his words, Haroon teaches Karim that, “We must find an entirely new way of being alive” (36).

### **Hybridity as Performance**

This “new way of being” is the performance of a hybrid identity. In colonial discourse, “hybridity” carried a negative connotation as a symbol of miscegenation and the loss of racial purity (Hammond 222). The concept of hybridity has in fact been scrutinized for assuming a false purity.<sup>10</sup> The term “hybrid” presupposes two singular and separate, unadulterated races or cultures—implying that the original two are more stable, pure, or fixed (Smith 251). Thus, hybridity presents the potential forfeiture of “whiteness,” an anxiety among some of the characters that Karim encounters in *Buddha*. The father of one of Karim’s romantic interests, Helen—referred to only as “Hairy Back”—is one such character. He is enraged by a visit from Karim who reacts by going “white, but obviously not white enough” because Hairy Back lets loose his Great Dane and shouts a number of derogatory names at Karim, including “wog,” “Blackie,” “nigger,” and “coon” (40). Given these specific racial slurs, readers cannot assume that Hairy Back would have responded in at all the same way if Karim bore the traditional, outward appearance of a white Englishman. Bart Moore-Gilbert interprets this scene as

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Bart Moore-Gilbert’s *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (1997).

demonstrative that “national belonging is associated with ethnic homogeneity” (*Hanif Kureishi* 130-31). The father’s tirade is less about Helen’s chastity and more about Karim’s bodily representation of racial impurity. In his description of the Notting Hill race riots of 1958, Ashley Dawson explains that “black migrants were viewed by the neofascists, by many members of the political establishment, and by much of the populace in general as a threat to racial purity and, consequently, to national identity” (28-9). Karim’s outward appearance suggests mixed birth; subsequently, his courtship of Helen is a threat to what Hairy Back views as the spotlessness of his white family.

The reaction of Helen’s father leads readers to question the progressiveness of hybridity which is sometimes used as a “synonym for diversity or multiculturalism relies on the assumption of separate and distinct cultural orders” (Smith 251). Bhabha contends that the colonizers and the colonized depend upon one another to build a shared culture; hybridity both “entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5) and “carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (38), which may be defined as emancipatory. For example, Andrew Hammond uses the term “ethnic hybridity” to denote “the way that elements of diverse, seemingly contradictory cultures can, without losing their uniqueness, meet and combine to create a third space of identity” (222).

Critics such as Berthold Schoene and Rebecca Fine Romanow interpret Karim’s hybrid identity as constructive and liberating. Specifically, Romanow suggests that *Buddha* “describes and subverts the cultural and social expectations of the immigrant subject” (70). One piece of evidence she provides is Karim’s subversive performance of Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*—how he uses humor to mock colonial oppression. Similarly, Schoene refers to Karim as a “herald of hybridity” in the title of his 1998 article. In his

interpretation, *Buddha* “presents [readers] with a chaotic scramble for identity and self-authentication, from which perhaps only Karim is exempt” (Schoene 115). He goes on to say that Karim “appears untroubled” by his cultural or ethnic identity. In supporting his claims, however, Schoene quotes only selectively from the famous (previously discussed) opening passage. Schoene states, “Rather than torn by ‘the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, or belonging and now’ (p. 3), his subjectivity stays intact” (Schoene 117). The entirety of this quoted passage clearly illustrates that the “belonging and not” is part of what “makes [Karim] restless and easily bored” (*Buddha* 3; emphasis added). Although Karim is not completely sure about the root of his feelings, he wants something to change. He says, “Things were so gloomy” and “it was all getting me down” (3). As a Bildungsroman, *The Buddha of Suburbia* plainly depicts Karim struggling with his maturation in a specific place and time. His hybridity—his biracial appearance and mixed parentage—causes him plenty of social discomfort. Karim describes being called “Shitface and Curryface, and of coming home [from school] covered in spit and snot and chalk and woodshavings” (*Buddha* 63).

Given evidence from the novel, I align myself with critics like Hammond and Moore-Gilbert who find Bhabha’s theory a bit too optimistic to be truly applicable to *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Moore-Gilbert finds Kureishi “more ambivalent,” and Hammond goes so far as to say that Kureishi is generally pessimistic about the potential of hybridity (as a concept) to challenge the myriad injustices of the 1980s. In Hammond’s reading of *Buddha*’s plot, “Western culture proves itself to be a predatory formation that, far from combining democratically with others, destroys what it encounters” (Hammond 226). Perhaps nothing illustrates the cultural climate of the time better than Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher's fretfulness about integration in the United Kingdom. In a 1978 televised speech, Thatcher described the nation as being "swamped by people of a different culture" and referred to the need to "allay people's fears." Given the cultural climate, Haroon and Karim can only function as alienated hybrids. This form of hybridity is defined by Patrick Colm Hogan as a "categorical identity in which one implicitly or explicitly affirms one's relation to metropolitan tradition, and finds oneself practically integrated into (i.e., competent in) that tradition" (243).

Hanif Kureishi stated in the late 1990s that the hybridity he defines in his writing is unfamiliar and new: "They [critics in England] don't see the world is now hybrid" (qtd. in Kaleta 7). Kureishi says that one's identity is "some sort of alliance between the way you see yourself and the way other people in the world see you" (qtd. in Yousaf 50). Indeed, Haroon and Karim must synthesize how they perceive themselves and how others view them as "oriental" and "exotic." Karim learns from his father to make good use of these perceptions. His identity is marketable. Karim feels this from the first time he meets Haroon's soon-to-be-mistress: Eva. "Then, holding me at arm's length as if I were a coat she was about to try on, she looked me all over and said, 'Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original!'" (9). Karim has the look; now he must learn how to perform his cultural identity.

To utilize Judith Butler's theories about performance, I turn to "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in which she rejects essentialized notions of gender. Instead, she states, "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (527). This same idea may be applied to cultural performance as both racial

and gender differences are observed in relationship to the body. Homi Bhabha even refers to Butler's "mode of performative agency" in Chapter 11 of *The Location of Culture* (219).

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler summarizes Freud's Oedipal Complex in which a son goes through a series of emotions in regards to both his mother and father. The boy initially desires the sole attention of the mother, which arouses feelings of jealousy and hostility towards the father (Butler 76). For Freud, sons try to attain an identity similar to their fathers to avoid castration upon the father's realization that the son desires his mother. The boy strengthens his relationship with the father. Freud calls this gender consolidation; "The young boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him" (qtd. in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 75). Therefore, for Freud, the son's imitation of his father is a type of defense mechanism. Crackenthorpe adds, "More striking for a study of identity is the recurrence of emphasis on the father's histrionic nature or capacity, as though the son must work through a number of shifting parts played by his father in order to fix the identity he needs for himself" (27-8). Indeed, Karim must negotiate a number of identities that Haroon has created for himself, and it is the son's imitation of the father that results in Karim's career as an actor and his ambiguous national identity.

### **The Importance of Language**

The acquisition of language and how an individual vocally presents himself can ensure acceptance into a community or lead to rejection. Haj Yazdiha states, "In addition to race, language has long been bound in definitions as a symbol of nation and a mode of exclusion" (33). Speech alteration is a lesson that Karim learns from his father at an early age. Karim recalls his father carrying around a dictionary and asking him to quiz him on

English words. Haroon explains, “You never know when you might need a heavyweight word to impress an Englishman” (28). This comment suggests that Haroon engages in performative mimicry, the adoption of speech and non-verbal cultural codes, which signals an effort to assimilate (Godiwala 66). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon asserts, “ To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (17-18). Haroon’s marriage to an Englishwoman (and extramarital affair with an Englishwoman) further suggests an effort to assimilate into English culture. Haroon’s in-laws insist on giving him an English nickname: “Harry.” Karim explains “Ted and Jean never called Dad by his Indian name, Haroon Amir. He was always ‘Harry’ to them, and they spoke of him as Harry to other people. It was bad enough his being an Indian in the first place, without having an awkward name too” (33). Despite the ways in which Haroon identifies as an “Englishman,” he learns later in life that his claim to an “exotic” heritage, along with his dark skin and accent, can lead to both financial gain and precious social capital in the London suburbs. As John Clement Ball writes, “father and son both become faux-Indians, successfully marketing back to the English warmed-over versions of their own popular appropriations of Indian culture” (233).

Karim overhears his father working privately to reclaim his Indian accent in preparation for a show, and Karim, like his father, comes to recognize the social capital connected to dialect. The first stage director with whom Karim works, Jeremy Shadwell, admonishes Karim during his initial interview for not knowing how to speak Punjabi and Urdu. Yet Shadwell insists that Karim perform his role as Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*

with a Bengali accent. At first, Karim resists and pleads with Shadwell: “It’s a political matter to me” (147). This is one way in which Karim and Haroon importantly differ. Haroon embraces his chance to perform a “mystical” role, while as Parama Sarkar points out, Karim is resistant (50). Karim’s short-term hesitation wanes as he quickly realizes that if he wants the role, he must fulfill the director’s expectations. “[Karim] knows that the ‘Indianness,’ he experiences or performs has very little to do with either the India of his father’s past and imagination or with the real country he has never set foot on or knows almost nothing of” (Brancato 58). Nick Bentley suggests that Shadwell’s directives exemplify what Paul Gilroy calls “cultural racism”: “a form of prejudice that does not focus directly on biology but attempts to re-establish a power relationship based on the perceived cultural practices engaged in by a particular ethnic group” (Bentley 164). Shadwell’s instructions cause Karim to reflect upon the ways he expresses his identity, specifically language and dialect.

Karim’s girlfriend, Eleanor, describes Karim’s natural parlance as cute, “like cockney, only not so raw” (178). Realizing that the socioeconomic gap between he and Eleanor is audible in the rhythms of his speech, Karim vows to lose his accent: “I would speak like her. It wasn’t difficult. I’d left my world; I had to, to get on” (178; emphasis added). Here, the question of language is clearly more about class than ethnicity, but Karim has learned from his father that many aspects of one’s identity can be modified—and should be modified—in the interest of social mobility. In discussing the importance of language in the process of identity construction, Bhawan Jain points to a metaphor used by Zadie Smith in her article, “Speaking in Tongues.” Smith explains that the voice of her adulthood is not the voice of her childhood. In college, she picked up a new way of



talking and believed that she was “adding Cambridge to Willesden.” She writes, “I felt a sort of wonder at the flexibility of the thing. Like being alive twice” (Smith 133). Now, however, her voice has melded into one. Each was a part of her, and she writes, “I should have kept both voices alive in my mouth. They were both a part of me. But how the culture warns against it!” (Smith 133). The new voice replacing the double voice “signifies how British culture influences its subject and transforms it, and vice versa” (Jain 110).

At one time in his life, Haroon needed to sound like an Englishman to reach his goals; he spent “years trying to be more of an Englishman” (21). Now his goals have changed and the Indian accent adds to the Eastern mysticism he is attempting to market. Haroon grasps that his guru appearances require what Parama Sarkar calls a process of “self-orientalization” (47). He therefore starts “hissing his s’s and exaggerating his Indian accent.” He is now “putting [an Indian accent] back in spadeloads” (*Buddha* 21). Karim invents a false Indian inflection in order to break into the acting world, and now he wishes to shake off his natural-born South London accent in order “to get on,” that is, to fit in with the upper middle class, white world in which Eleanor resides. By the end of the novel, Karim demonstrates self-awareness of his performance. He describes his feelings when surrounded by Eleanor’s upper class, educated friends and family: “What infuriated me—what made me loathe both them and myself—was their confidence and knowledge. The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing the way round a whole culture—it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital” (177). Karim’s subject position does not allow him to access some of the cultural markers presented here, but Karim is growing up to become an artist, a talented performer.

The emphasis on language is only one aspect of identity performance. Rehana Ahmed argues that “the notion of the performative” is a focus in *Buddha* “as a means of destabilising essentialist identity categories and debunking notions of authenticity” (30). Indeed, throughout the novel, many characters move in and out of identity categories, blurring what it means to be authentic. The malleability of nationhood is foregrounded in Karim and Jamila’s experiments with music, reading, and dressing. Karim narrates, “Yeah, sometimes we were French, Jammie and I, and other times we went black American. The thing was, we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it” (53). Karim does not say that he and Jamila “pretended” to be French or that they dressed like the French; rather, he says “we were,” implying that all national identity consists of is performance or desire. Interestingly, Karim and Jamila do not experiment with American identity in general; rather, they specify “black American” culture. Given the long history of racial conflict in the United States, it seems that Karim and Jamila—even in their playful fantasies—sympathize with marginalized or historically oppressed communities. Furthermore, according to the quoted passage, they “were supposed to be English,” but according to whom? Is it their location in England that demands their assimilation? Or the watchful eyes of the white majority?

These imaginative games with Jamila at such a young age suggest that Karim has a natural talent for performance; he lives his life for an audience. From the early pages of the novel, readers learn that Karim takes “several months to get ready” (6). He often struggles to find the “right clothes” (6), which supports a point made by Berkem Gurenci

Saglam: Karim dresses and grooms himself in preparation to meet a critical audience (Saglam 558).

Karim undoubtedly encounters a number of characters that confirm the benefits of performativity, but it is Haroon's first "guru gig" which proves that Karim learns much about the art of imitation from his father's cultural performance. While many of Eva's guests admire Haroon, Karim and Jamila think that his act is fake and a contrived method by which to obtain Eva's affections. Moore-Gilbert states that Kureishi uses the enthusiasm of some of Haroon's white followers to parody "the narrative of empire as an evangelizing project" (123). "Instead of Indian natives compliantly absorbing the religious wisdom of the West, the native British seek deliverance from their ersatz immigrant guru" (Moore-Gilbert 123). Haroon parodies the eastern spirituality represented by Professor Godbole in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. However, as Edward Said reminds us in *Orientalism*, even seemingly innocuous stereotypes about the mysticism and spirituality of the East symbolize the colonizer's power through knowledge (150).

When Haroon visits Eva to provide spiritual guidance to her and her friends, Karim observes his father in a sexual embrace with the hostess: "As [Karim] crawled closer there was enough moonlight for [him] to see that Eva was on the bench. She was pulling her kaftan up over her head" (15). Karim narrates,

Beneath all this hair and flesh, and virtually concealed from me, was my father. I knew it was Daddio because he was crying out across the Beckenham gardens, with little concern for the neighbours, 'Oh God, oh my God, oh my God.' Was I conceived like this, I wondered, in the suburban night air, to the wailing of

Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist? (16)

It is traumatic for a child—even a teenager like Karim—to witness a sexual act by a parent, but Haroon’s behavior is arguably even more shocking for Karim as it involves an extra-marital partner and occurs in “a liminal space between public and private” (Brook 218). Proof of the incident’s powerful impression lies in Karim’s response to his father’s behavior: he retreats into the house and immediately engages in a homosexual act with Charlie, Eva’s son. This is Karim’s response to his father’s taboo deed, which could be construed as an act of revenge towards the father. Karim’s encounter is subversive because it is homosexual in nature as is Haroon’s act because it is a betrayal of Karim’s mother, Margaret.

After this, Karim generates a quasi-comic moniker for Haroon, “God,” which he openly uses for a generous portion of the text. This is humorous in that the nickname originates from Haroon’s exclamations during sex, but it also provides insight into the dynamic between father and son. Karim acknowledges from the very beginning of the novel that it is Haroon who holds the future of the Amir household—and Karim’s adolescent world—in his hands. Karim says, “Then one day everything changed. In the morning things were one way and by bedtime another” (3). The day referred to is the day Haroon first cheats on Margaret and Karim begins to call his father “God.” In many ways, Haroon is in control of Karim’s life, but Karim is learning of his father’s imperfections. This realization echoes that of Edmund Gosse in the aforementioned autobiographical *Father and Son*. Gosse writes,

I confused [father] in some sense with God; at all events I believed that my Father knew everything and saw everything. [...] Here was the appalling discovery, never suspected before, that my Father was not as God, and did not know everything. The shock was not caused by any suspicion that he was not telling the truth, as it appeared to him, but by the awful proof that he was not, as I had supposed, omniscient. (56)

Part of the coming-of-age process, made explicit in many examples of Bildungsromans, is not only the son breaking away from the father but also recognizing the father's shortcomings. Even though Karim registers many of his father's deeds as inappropriate and damaging, he imitates them nonetheless.

Just as Karim mimics Haroon's sexual act, he, consciously or not, continues to follow his father's example by pursuing an acting career. Karim credits Haroon with setting him on his acting path: "Once, when I was seven or eight, Dad told me he thought I should become an actor" (23). Karim's time on stage is another example of his "in-between-ness" because elements of his real-life experience infiltrate his performances. The stage "is a place that both exists within the reality of the modern world, and yet retains the notion of the non-place, for the world it imagines is one of pretense and exists in [a] type of global temporality" (Romanow 90). When Karim meets his first director, Shadwell, he is happy to be told "I'm looking for an actor just like you. [...] An actor who'll fit the part (140). At first Karim does not know that the show is a stage adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*,<sup>11</sup> and Shadwell needs a Mowgli that is "dark-

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<sup>11</sup> Moore-Gilbert comments on the significance of the chosen story: "Just as Mowgli must negotiate between his identities as man and wolf-cub, so Karim is torn between different cultural identifications and, like Mowgli, he is in a process of maturation" (125).

skinned,” “small and wiry” (142). Shadwell is appalled to learn that Karim has never travelled to India. He says,

What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement there'd be. Everyone looks at you, I'm sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we'll hear now from him. And you're from Orpington. (141)

Whereas Haroon voluntarily chooses to embrace Eastern stereotypes with his hobby, Karim feels incredible pressure to submit to Shadwell's vision in order to succeed as an actor. He conforms and wears a loincloth and brown make-up on stage so that “[he] resembled a turd in a bikini-bottom” (146). Shadwell also dictates that Karim deliver his lines with an Indian accent, telling his star that he has been “cast for authenticity and not for experience” (147). What Shadwell means by “authenticity” is clearly based upon an English stereotype of Indians. “What Kureishi exposes here is the contrived nature of concepts of ethnicity which accentuate difference while eradicating all traces of potential sameness” (Schoene 121).

Rebecca Fine Romanow understands Karim's acting as a “trying-on of identities and the ultimate refusal of the identity that British culture imposes on Karim” (88). He is “echoing and inhabiting the role he is cast in by British society” (Romanow 89). However, she asserts that Karim's portrayal of Mowgli subverts the classically colonial play. The performance amounts to ethnic drag; “Karim's strained impersonation of Mowgli signals that the alleged original is an impossible act—a ludicrous, anachronistic travesty” (Schoene 121). In this way, Karim gets a taste of the power that he admires in

both Haroon and Charlie's public performances; Karim thinks, "I recognized that what I liked in Dad and Charlie was their insistence on standing apart. I like the power they had and the attention they received. I like the way people admired and indulged them" (149-50). But the "power" that Karim describes is really just savvy marketing. Haroon and Charlie sell the images of themselves that the public is willing to buy. Berkem Gurenci Saglam emphasizes the influence that Charlie Kay's musical success has on Karim. Karim witnesses Charlie's acquisition of a fake cockney accent and notes Charlie's "manufactured rage" (*Buddha* 154; emphasis added). Karim describes Charlie's adopted persona as "a wonderful trick and disguise" (*Buddha* 154).

Shadwell does not demand that Karim master a foreign language; rather, Karim must merely focus on the intonation of his voice and the pronunciation of English words. Karim relapses into a cockney accent at times during his interpretation of Mowgli, which could be read as a rebellion against Shadwell's expectations. Karim is asserting agency, but he is operating within the only role available to him, and Karim continues to be typecast in "oriental" roles throughout the novel. Whether his acting is subversive or not, it does not lead to ultimate acceptance as a new type of Englishman. In fact, Karim's perception of himself as an "Englishman" is modified by the end of the novel as he settles into his performative, hybrid role. This is made evident in a response to his mother when she asks after a performance, "Who gave birth to you? You're an Englishman, I'm glad to say" (*Buddha* 232). Karim responds, "I'm an actor. It's a job" (233). Karim is torn between the way he personally identifies as "a funny kind of Englishman" (3) and the way many of his acquaintances seek to impose an Oriental identity upon him based only on appearance. Haroon benefits from the stereotypical perspectives of others, and from

this example, Karim discerns that his predicament has distinct advantages. Haroon draws upon a variety of Eastern resources to consciously fashion an “Oriental” identity for himself, and now his son realizes that “if [he] wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, [he] would have to create it (213). Both father and son learn that cultural difference is marketable; they can invent the difference and sell back to the “English their colonial vision of the oriental other” (Brancato 58).

### **Imitation of the Father**

Thus far, I have illustrated how Karim learns from his father the importance of identity performance, and rather than pulling further away from his father, he actually becomes more and more like him. In a 1997 psychoanalytical reading of *Buddha*, Max Vega-Ritter takes this notion much further by claiming that Karim “decides to follow the father, and even to confuse himself with him” (qtd. in Thomas 81-2). “Father and son function together. When he makes love to Eleanor, Karim remembers his father and identifies with him” (qtd. in Thomas 82). The line to which Vega-Ritter is referring reads, “Perhaps I was living out his dreams as I embraced Eleanor’s flesh...” (*Buddha* 207). This scene, coupled with the previously discussed sex scene between Haroon and Eva, followed by Karim’s sexual encounter with Charlie, can be interpreted as a sign of intimacy in the father and son relationship. Even in his most personal moments, Karim’s thoughts drift to the primary source of his identity formation: his dad.

The bond between Haroon and Karim, however, is challenged in the novel as Karim tries out alternative paternal figures: his Uncle Ted and his stage directors, Shadwell and Pyke. These potential fathers may be interpreted as representative of two competing identities—options that Karim faces when it comes to living out a cultural



identity: assimilation and essentialism. The text suggests that Uncle Ted would like to forget the native homeland of Karim's father. Ted is the family member who wants to Anglicize Haroon's name and calls him "Harry." He is a typical, middle-class, white Englishman who owns a central heating business. Karim narrates:

Uncle Ted and I were great mates. Sometimes he took me on central heating jobs with him. I got paid for doing the heavy work. We ate corned-beef sandwiches and drank tea from our thermos flask. He gave me sporting tips and took me to the Catford dog track and Epsom Downs. He talked to me about pigeon racing. Ever since I was tiny I'd loved Uncle Ted, because he knew about the things other boys' fathers knew about, and Day, to my frustration, didn't: fishing and air rifles, aeroplanes, and how to eat winkles. (33)

The activities listed in this passage are not only typical of adventures fathers and sons may experience together; they are also remarkably bound up in English culture. For instance, in his 1986 essay, "Bradford," Kureishi recalls memories shared with his English grandfather: "pigeon-keeping, greyhound racing, roast beef eating and pianos in pubs" (*Collected Essays*, 39). Three of the four activities here coincide with the ones Karim recounts in relation to his Uncle Ted. Clearly, Kureishi is drawing parallels between his and Karim's experiences with an English father figure—one that encourages full assimilation into English culture.

On the other hand, the older men with whom Karim connects in the beginning of his acting career encourage him to cultivate his Eastern heritage. Karim first learns about Pyke from a peer named Terry: "Pyke was the star of the flourishing alternative theatre scene; he was one of the most original directors around" (*Buddha* 159). It makes sense

that Karim would be eager to meet Pyke—not only for an advancement in his acting career—but also because, according to Freud, children seek out replacement parental figures that are “of higher social standing” (Freud 238). Karim feels an immediate connection to Pyke, believing that Pyke would understand everything he said (*Buddha* 163). Karim “told him things I’d never told anyone—how much I resented Dad for what he’d done to Mum, and how Mum had suffered, how painful the whole thing had been, though I was only now beginning to feel it” (163). But Pyke soon betrays Karim’s trust by stealing his girlfriend. As Susheila Nasta explains, “Pyke can be seen to be repeating, despite the new camouflage of a left-wing philosophy of cultural diversity, yet a different version of an essentially colonialist authenticity” (203). While Ted is an inadequate father figure because of his commitment to English culture and efforts to Anglicize the Amir family, Pyke is equally inadequate because of his arrogance and manipulation.

Haroon, as Karim’s biological father who remembers his homeland and his initial absorption into English culture, leads his son by example to perform an identity that white English culture is willing to buy. Haroon and Karim use their opportunities to introduce hybridity while essentialized versions of cultural identity in the novel are destroyed. Berthold Schoene states, “Ultimately, Karim’s ethnic drag acts opens up the possibility of imagining the proliferation of individual identities beyond the bounds of racial originality or ethnic authenticity, that is, the gradual coming-into-being of black Englishmen of white Indians” (121-22).

### **The Power of Performance**

Let us turn now to the aforementioned subplot, which illustrates a very different father and son relationship—the one that Haroon’s best friend, Anwar, attempts to forge

with his son-in-law. In a generalized observation of immigrant fathers in Kureishi's work, Donald Weber writes that they "are limned as a comical cohort ... the Pakistani elders in Kureishi tend to preside over their new worlds from bed, reaping in the material benefits of England while recuperating old world ways." This assessment does not adequately describe Haroon, but it does fit with the character of Anwar as well as Omar's father in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Both men aspired to financial prosperity and happiness in England; these dreams do not come to fruition, and like his dear friend, Anwar modifies his approach to life. Whereas Haroon "now prospers on what he can retrieve of his Indian past, conflating it with Eva and her friends' spurious conception of Indianness" (Schoene 116), Anwar reclaims Islam in a radical fashion and goes on a hunger strike to persuade Jamila to marry an Indian Muslim recommended by Anwar's brother in Bombay (57).

Anwar's hunger strike—designated as "The Great Sulk" by Karim—is an elaborate ruse to compel Jamila to relinquish the agency that she has learned to assert in her life as a young woman in late twentieth century London. O'Shea-Maddour asserts that critics have been overly quick to follow Karim's lead when he suggests that Anwar's actions and motives for those actions are rooted in an "authentic" or "native" identification with Islam (36-7). Prior to the hunger strike, Anwar is similar to Parvez, the father in Kureishi's short story, "My Son the Fanatic." Anwar gambles; he drinks alcohol; he even "scoff[s] pork pies" (64). Like Haroon, Anwar brought his family to London for opportunities and assimilated in many ways. Now, he suddenly starts "behaving like a Muslim" (73). To O'Shea-Maddour, "the narrative emphasizes that Anwar's experience of being a Muslim in India was a complex and hybrid one" (37). "Even when the text appears to chart Anwar's 'return' to a stable 'Muslim' subjectivity,

the narrative destabilises it. For example, whilst Karim informs us that Anwar is ‘regularly attending the mosque,’ extended paragraphs reveal that he is frequently found at the bottom of the stairs in a drunken stupor” (37).

Nahim Yousaf interprets Anwar’s hunger strike in a different way: “In Anwar, Kureishi demonstrates that the ‘old ways’ first generation immigrants are prone to cling to outside their country of birth are outmoded and redundant” (44). But Anwar’s motivations for clinging to this behavior at this specific moment are selfish. Indeed, Anwar defines his purpose, “If Gandhi can shove the English out of India by not eating, I can get my family to obey me by exactly the same” (60). Just as Haroon performs an exotic version of himself to gain social capital, Anwar performs religiosity for an end goal—to “combat (successfully if only symbolically) his daughter’s assimilation” within English society” (Ball 234). In calling up his Islamic identity, “he represents himself as having a ‘fixed identity’ that originates in his ‘motherland’ and it is this that Kureishi deplores and satirizes” (Yousaf 44). Whereas hybridity and performance work for Haroon and Karim, fixed views lead to conflict, like Jamila’s forced marriage to Changez. Yousaf writes, “For the author, one of the fundamental problems in British society is a hankering after a fixed, unbending, originary identity that takes little account of the various ethnic groups and communities that comprise contemporary Britain” (44).

### **Impossible Identities**

In her essay, “The I Who Is Not Me,” Zadie Smith discusses the idea of “impossible identities.” She writes, “It seems to me that people experiencing impossible identities—who find it impossible to imagine being, for example, Muslim and gay, or Jewish and obscene, or black and nerdy, or female and perverse, or Protestant and Irish—

can build up a terrible tension within themselves” (341). Perhaps Anwar senses this very tension in himself. He finds the contradictions in his identity unbearable whereas the new generation—seen here in Jamila and Karim—seems able to cope with new cultural ambiguities. “Thus Anwar’s reversion to the role of a traditionalist Muslim father, who forces his radical feminist daughter into an arranged marriage is satirized by Kureishi both for the hypocrisy his position represents (as he beats his wife and carries on drinking alcohol) and the untenability of any essentialism” (Nasta 201-2).

The name of the man summoned from the East to marry the reluctant Jamila is Changez. Nathanael O’Reilly asserts that the name is most certainly a nod to David Bowie’s song “Changes,”<sup>12</sup> and the character lives up to his name by bringing “change” in a much different form than Anwar expects. Anwar has specific ideas about the role of son that Changez will fill. Namely, he anticipates that Changez will take over the family business, have children with Jamila immediately, and relieve Anwar of the physical hardships associated with running his market.

On the contrary, Changez embodies many characteristics that Anwar associates with the West and despises. For example, rather than asserting power and control over his wife, Changez takes on a feminized domestic role, even developing breasts after Jamila’s child (conceived with another man) is born. Changez is lazy; his very appearance—specifically his disfigured left arm (81)—suggests that he will fail to live up to Anwar’s expectations. Upon first meeting Karim, Changez tells him that he reads “the classics,” by which he means P.G. Wodehouse and Conan Doyle (83). He wants to visit bookshops in the Charing Cross Road and Sherlock Holmes’s house in Baker Street. In short, all

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<sup>12</sup> Kureishi and Bowie attended the same school ten years apart, and Bowie’s music is used in the 1993 BBC adaptation of *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

aspects of English popular culture fascinate Changez, especially the sexual freedoms he discovers.

When Jamila will not sleep with him, Changez turns to the services of a Japanese sex worker named Shinko. In the pivotal scene of chapter 14, which leads to Anwar's death, Changez must choose between Shinko and the life of pleasure he has created for himself and the demands of his Islamic father-in-law. Anwar approaches Changez and Shinko on the street: "the disappointed father-in-law was intending to crack his son-in-law over the loaf right now – and possibly club him to death" (210). In a calm but desperate response, Changez "withdrew the knobby dildo from its paper-bag sheath, and with a Muslim warrior shout ... whacked my [Anwar] smartly over the head with it" (210). The dildo in this scenario is clearly a symbol of Western sexuality. Anwar dies, suggesting that a radical Muslim identity—indeed, any extreme, one-dimensional identity—cannot survive in Britain.

The father and son relationship between Anwar and Changez represents a binary between extreme representations of Eastern and Western identities. In the words of Kenneth Kaleta, "Anwar and Changez may share a common cultural tradition, but their attitudes are antipodal" (198). Kureishi's portrayal of the extremes in Anwar and Changez mock "reliance on fixed essentialist conceptions of identity, which replicate precisely the assumptions that the author most deplors" (Moore-Gilbert 133-34). "Haroon's understanding that his roots are located in an 'imagined India' (BS 74), with all the provisionality which this implies, distinguishes him sharply from Anwar who, as the novel progresses, increasingly embraces a damagingly rigid and exclusionary conception of his 'original' identity" (Moore-Gilbert 134).

In closing, *The Buddha of Suburbia* can be connected to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* in that both belong to the Bildungsroman genre and both feature young men growing into artists in different ways. Like Stephen, Karim "is making the new out of the old" (Smith, *Feel Free*, 246). Karim values one specific dramatic performance above all others: his portrayal of Changez presented as a character study. Karim reflects,

I became more energetic and alive as I brushed in new colours and shades. I worked regularly and kept a journal; I saw that creation was an accretive process which couldn't be hurried, and which involved patience and primarily, love. I felt more solid myself, and not as if my mind were just a kind of cinema for a myriad impressions and emotions to flicker through. This was worth doing, this had meaning, this added up elements of my life. (217)

As this passage illustrates, Karim's artistic endeavors help him to piece together different aspects of his identity, to solidify his own unique personhood. In an interview with Alison McLeod, Kureishi comments on this passage: "Well, although Karim is an actor, it actually describes the process of being a writer." This remark helps us to understand that the mode of expression is not the point. Rather, Karim locates his identity and finds a way to articulate it. His mode of choice relies heavily on lessons learned from his father.

A Bildungsroman is traditionally a novel of education, and an important aspect of Karim's education is learning how and where to position himself in postcolonial England with one Indian parent and one English parent. Much of the education passes from Haroon to Karim—from father to son. Kureishi has acknowledged his habit of writing about fathers, and he continues to explore father and son relationships after the

publication of *Buddha*—in *The Black Album* (1995) and *Intimacy* (1998), just to name two. Nevertheless, Kureishi has shown deep satisfaction with his portrayal of Haroon and Karim. While drafting *The Black Album*, he said, “There’s a father in some of the plays, and I wrote him in *Laundrette*. I finally put a father in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. I have three or four goes at something, and then I leave it and move on. I was very pleased with the father in the *Buddha*, and I don’t think I will write any more fathers for a long time to come. I’m finished with that now” (qtd. in Kaleta 134).

*Buddha* both begins and ends with shared scenes between father and son. Although the issues of the novel are not fully resolved, father and son have a close relationship, and Kureishi emphasizes how both continue to perform their identities. Moore-Gilbert finds the ending of *Buddha* unsatisfactory because Karim does not make a decisive choice as to which culture to embrace. He does not discover a “satisfying synthesis of, or compromise between, them” (Moore-Gilbert 127). The closing lines of the novel, however, are hopeful and optimistic; Karim narrates, “I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way” (284). Berthold Schoene calls the ending “highly optimistic,” (124) but if, as Schoene states, “Karim is free continuously to reinvent his identity which—due to the ‘creamy’ colour of his skin, his nomadic lifestyle and bisexual inclinations—remains ultimately unintelligible within the framework of the society he inhabits” (119), then why are his potential acting engagements so limited?

In the final scene of the novel, Karim hosts a small party to celebrate his new job on a soap opera: “[He] would play the rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper”



(259). While it seems that Karim is still being typecast because of his appearance, Haroon expresses satisfaction that Karim is “doing something visible” (280). And Haroon takes Eva’s advice to put on his Nehru jacket to impress onlookers at the restaurant: “the waiters would think he was an ambassador or a prince, or something” (282). Once again, the emphasis is on being seen—being recognized as a subject with agency—even if that recognition relies upon a carefully constructed, performed identity.

### CHAPTER 3: FATHERS AND SONS IN THE EARLY WORK OF ZADIE SMITH

Zadie Smith's debut novel, *White Teeth* (2000), received both popular praise and vast critical attention, winning awards such as the Commonwealth Writers' First Book Award and the Whitbread First Novel Award. My analysis of *White Teeth* as a novel about fathers and sons is derived from several current threads in scholarship on the text. First, Smith openly acknowledges the influence that E.M. Forster has had on her work, explicitly articulating the connections between her 2005 novel, *On Beauty*, and Forster's *Howard's End* (1910).<sup>13</sup> In the acknowledgements to *On Beauty*, Smith writes, "It should be obvious from the first line that this is a novel inspired by a love of E.M. Forster, to whom all my fiction is indebted, one way or the other." It is not surprising then that Smith's epigraph to the first section of *White Teeth* is a quotation from Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). However, a link exists between the two plots that perhaps Smith herself has not explicitly made. One of *White Teeth*'s fathers, Samad Iqbal, struggles to impart upon his son a cultural identity with South Asia and a religious identity with Islam. The entire story of *Angels* revolves around a scandalous love affair, which results in marriage and the birth of one male child. This child's mother—an Englishwoman—dies shortly after giving birth, and the remaining parent is Italian. The mother's family decides to intervene, travel to Italy, and remove the infant from his father's custody in order to give the son a "proper" English education. Thus, before the child is even capable of understanding the differing cultures of his parents, he is caught in a tug of war between two families and two lifestyles.

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<sup>13</sup> For more on Forster's influence on Smith's work, see Frank Kermode's review of *On Beauty*: "Here She Is." *London Review of Books*, vol. 21, no. 19, 2005, pp. 13-14 and Fiona Tolan's "Zadie Smith's Forsterian Ethics: *White Teeth*, *The Autograph Man*, *On Beauty*" in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2013, pp. 135-46.

The binary mindset of the family—their categorical belief that Englishness is respectable and Italian culture is corrupt—ultimately results in the child’s tragic death at the end of *Angels*. The English family refuses to tolerate what they view as a corruption of their English bloodline. For them, it is bad enough that the child carries the genes of an Italian man, but their quick action to alter the child’s environment suggests that they believe “nurture” can overcome “nature.” Likewise, *White Teeth*’s Samad sends one of his twin sons to Bangladesh, his homeland, in an effort to tether him to tradition and rescue him from England’s corrupt culture.

The connections between the works of Forster and Smith regarding child rearing and cultural assimilation are important for my exploration of national identity. Many critics have praised *White Teeth* as a multicultural novel that depicts an urban space shared by several distinct ethnic groups. The judges of the 2000 Whitbread Award called it a “landmark for multicultural Britain, as well as a superb portrait of contemporary London” (qtd. in Squires 80). Simon Hattenstone echoes these sentiments in a 2000 interview with Smith, stating *White Teeth* is “very much a book about modern London, a city in which 40% of children are born to at least one black parent. . . . *White Teeth* reflects a new generation for whom race is the backdrop to daily life rather than the defining characteristic of existence.”<sup>14</sup> In an interview with Sarah Lyall the same year, Smith goes so far as to claim that *White Teeth* presents “a utopian view” of race relations; “It’s what it might be and what it should be and maybe what it will be.”<sup>15</sup> There are moments when this seems to be the case. For example, a description of a playground reads,

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<sup>14</sup> Simon Hattenstone, “White knuckle ride.” *The Guardian*. 11 Dec. 2000, pp. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Lyall. Interview: “A Good Start.” *The New York Times Book Review*, vol. 105, no. 18, 30 Apr. 2000, pp. 8.

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow, and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. It is only this late in the day that you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune. (*WT* 271)

On the surface, this passage paints a happy picture of racial and cultural diversity, which importantly focuses on children—innocent agents that can carry the peaceful broadmindedness of their youth into adulthood and then perhaps pass it onto a future generation. Some of the children's names clearly spring from interracial partnerships, suggesting a forthcoming generation of colorblind citizens. For instance, "Quang" is recognizable as an Asian name while "O'Rourke" is Irish. The naming becomes even more complicated when Smith mentions, "best friends Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other because Sita is white (her mother liked the name) and Sharon is Pakistani (her mother thought it best—less trouble)" (*WT* 271). The narrative occasionally describes shared spaces in this way; locales like O'Connell's pub and Glenard Oak School are ideal examples of what Mary Louise Pratt referred to as "contact zones" in the early 1990s.

This picture of interracial harmony, however, is only one small moment in a complex tale. Smith goes on to describe the children as having "first and last names on a direct collision course" (*WT* 271). The diction evokes the potential of a fiery crash between the two cultures represented by the child's first and last name. In keeping with this implication, Smith qualified her claims about the novel's "utopian view" in a 2005 interview with David Sexton in *The Sunday Telegraph*: "Asked whether its portrayal of a

happily multicultural land was not a little optimistic, she replied, ‘I think on one level I was just straight out wrong. I extrapolated from my own experience, as writers do, and I was wrong.’<sup>16</sup>

The “direct collision course” regarding names is merely one of the sprawling novel’s numerous conflicts, many of them violent. While critics have often emphasized the novel’s problems of race relations—Irie’s industrious efforts to shed her physical characteristics of blackness and Archie’s obliviousness to discrimination against his Jamaican wife—I will argue here that the primary conflict is one between generations, specifically between an immigrant father, Samad Iqbal, and his second-generation twin sons, Magid and Millat. This chapter will analyze how Samad’s immigrant status in England informs his personal sense of identity and how he attempts to influence the identity formation of his sons. Smith adeptly illustrates the tensions particular to this postcolonial family dynamic. Although readers might expect the white characters of the book to impose ideas of essentialism onto the nonwhite characters, it is actually Samad who holds essentialist views and wishes to control the formation of national identity in the lives of his children. With the Iqbal family, Smith examines the human need for belonging and the fear associated with cultural assimilation. I will then look to Smith’s sophomore novel, *The Autograph Man*, to explore the depiction of a Jewish-Chinese-English man, Alex-Li Tandem, who must establish his identity in the aftermath of his father’s sudden death.

At its core, *White Teeth* is a study of family—a social space that Irene Pérez - Fernández identifies as profoundly significant in England in the 1980s,<sup>17</sup> the same decade

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<sup>16</sup> David Sexton. “Zadie’s Mistake Radio.” *The Sunday Telegraph*. Review Section, 9 Jan. 2005, p. 7.

during which the bulk of the novel is set. It is through family interactions that we learn how to express and define ourselves. We do not acquire what we need for self-definition on our own. As Charles Taylor writes in *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, we are shaped “through interaction with others who matter to us—what George Herbert Mead called ‘significant others’” (Taylor 32). Family, a group of significant others, necessitates birth; therefore, quite appropriately, Smith’s novel both begins and ends with births. First, Archie Jones is symbolically reborn. He has attempted suicide by inhaling car exhaust fumes when a chance encounter resuscitates him: “Life wanted Archie. She had jealously grabbed him from the jaws of death, back to her bosom” (*WT* 6). At the conclusion of the novel, Irie (Archie’s daughter) gives birth to a child whose paternity is uncertain. Thus, the element of chance is featured prominently in both “births.” A total of four families comprise the cast of *White Teeth*: the English Joneses, Jamaican Bowdens, Bengalese Iqbals, and white Jewish Chalfens.

At the head of the Jones family and the Iqbal family are two fathers: Archie and Samad, who developed an unlikely friendship during World War II. The first conversation that readers witness between Archie and Samad focuses on the value of progeny; Samad asks, “...life without children, Archie, what is it for?” (11). Jennifer J. Gustar refers to *White Teeth* as a “novel of fathers” (334) that examines the colonial legacy of violence. In her reading, members of the younger generation attempt to match the heroic masculinity of the older generation. In alluding to the Prometheus myth, Gustar argues that Magid is a scientific over-reacher. In fact, Samad, Marcus Chalfen, and Magid all play God in some way. They try to “ignore the role of the accidental” (340)

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<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Fernández argues that during the 1980s in the United Kingdom, “there was a reassertion of the notion of family as an attempt to counter the disruptions that were taking place at a social level” (147).

and shape the future—“institution certainty and prohibiting the random, the accidental” (341).

### **Binary Beliefs**

As Matthew Paproth points out, the majority of the main characters in *White Teeth* are each caught between binaries: Millat struggles between the religious and the secular; Samad fluctuates between Eastern and Western values; Irie struggles to find connections between her family’s colonial past and her present situation; Archie wavers between his internal history and the realities of external history; Marcus Chalfen, with his “FutureMouse©” experiment, fighting randomness with predestination determined by science (Paproth 9). One important symbol that visualizes binaries is Archie’s signature coin toss. He uses this method of chance—emphasized with slow motion in the 2002 Channel 4 miniseries adaption—to determine numerous decisions, both major and minor. As we know there are two sides to a coin; therefore, a definitive binary in Archie’s decision-making process is established. He receives a “yes” or “no” answer each time, no “maybe’s” or conditional responses.

So solidified is Archie’s commitment to the coin-toss that he uses it to decide, in the first scene of the novel, whether or not he will go through with his New Year’s resolution to commit suicide. As he sits in his car with a vacuum cleaner connecting the exhaust pipe to the window: “He was resigned to it. He was prepared for it. He had flipped a coin and stood staunchly by the results. This was a decided-upon suicide” (3). In short, Archie relies on chance, or what is sometimes referred to as “fate,” to govern his behavior instead of any fixed belief system. Sigrun Meinig points out that a “discourse of

determinism” is established in the diction surrounding Archie’s failed suicide attempt (Meinig 244). For example,

While [Archie] slipped in and out of consciousness, the position of the planets, the music of the spheres, the flap of a tiger moth’s diaphanous wings in Central Africa, and a whole bunch of other stuff that Makes Shit Happen had decided it was second-chance time for Archie. Somewhere, somehow, by somebody, it had been decided that he would live. (4)

Notice Smith’s use of the passive voice in this sentence construction. Neither the narrator nor the character is able to name or identify precisely the force that “Makes Shit Happen.” It is not God or Allah. It is not Archie himself even though he may think he is taking direct action by flipping the coin and resolutely submitting to its verdict; this is merely an illusion of free will (Mellet 190). As Nick Bentley argues, Archie serves as a point of resistance to the various types of fundamentalism in the text; his “coin flip evades the imperatives of fundamentalism” (Bentley 500). Archie gives into the accidental. He relinquishes control.

Samad, on the other hand, believes in making definitive choices that are in keeping with one’s essential characteristics, attributes defined by fixed ideas of roots and the past. According to Samad, these essential characteristics derive from one’s bloodline—in his case, from the lineage of Mangel Pande, the man who allegedly fired the first shot of the Indian Mutiny/ Sepoy Rebellion. Throughout the novel, Samad tells the story of his great-great grandfather to anyone who will listen. Samad is brought to tears when an old book reveals his physical likeness to Pande, and he petitions to hang a portrait of Pande in O’Connell’s pub (205-6). During World War II, when Samad reveals



to Archie that his future wife (with whom he has an arranged marriage) has not yet been born, he says that her family has “extremely good blood” (83).

### **The War**

Much of what readers learn about Samad and how he articulates his national identity is wrapped up in his relationship with Archie in the context of war. The choice of setting adds to Smith’s commentary on racial and cultural identity. Ashley Dawson explains, “the specter of genocide lurks in the background of Samad and Archie’s clumsy attempts at heroism” (159). Smith has written about her own father’s experiences as a British soldier during World War II, and like the character of Archie, Harvey Smith captured a Nazi senior. Smith says that she turned this particular, biographical occurrence into “idiotic comedy for a novel” (“Speaking in Tongues” 235), but Archie’s character works as a foil to Samad. Samad is obsessed with his family history and believes in the power of his bloodline.

As Homi Bhabha discusses in *Nation and Narration* (1990), nations are narrative constructions, and identity with one nation or another may emerge through a mixture of historical, mythical, and fictional narratives (Bentley 488). The fact that readers first encounter Samad’s English allegiance through the lens of war is significant for a number of reasons. Paul Gilroy writes in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Culture* (1993), “War is ... a crucial process in clarifying the issue of national membership” (52). Benedict Anderson likens nation to family in that both involve pure, “disinterested” love. Service in the military may lead to sacrifice of life. “Dying for one’s country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur which dying for the Labour Party, the American Medical Association, or perhaps even Amnesty International can not rival,

for these are all bodies one can join or leave at easy will” (Anderson 132). Samad does not express a desire to martyr himself for the Allied cause in the War. He does, however, look for “his” war in what is also a pivotal moment that cements Archie and Samad’s friendship. Their tank breaks down in a Bulgarian village in May of 1945. The other men are attacked; only Samad and Archie remain, and Smith alludes to Forster’s *A Passage to India* in describing their bond:

Long, comfortable silences passed between them like those between women who have known each other for years. They looked out on to stars that lit up unknown country, but neither man clung particularly to home. In short, it was precisely the kind of friendship an Englishman makes on holiday, that he can make only on holiday. A friendship that crosses class and color, a friendship that takes as its basis physical proximity and survives because the Englishman assumes the physical proximity will not continue. (82)

Archie is “amazed” that Samad “wished to defend a country that wasn’t his and avenge the killing of men who would not have acknowledged him in a civilian street” (80). Despite the discrimination that Samad may experience on the streets of England, in *New World Order*, Caryl Phillips compares the relationship between colonizer and colonized to the dynamic between parent and offspring: “They expected from Britain in the same uncomplicated manner in which a child expects from the mother. They expected to be accepted, but they hoped to be loved. They expected to be treated fairly, but secretly they yearned for preference” (264). Samad’s fight extends beyond his duties as a British subject. “As was true for many soldiers from the colonies, [Samad’s] quest for glory in the European war is motivated primarily for his desire to sustain family honor” (Dawson

157). And with that family honor comes the family name. Samad makes his motivations very clear. He recognizes Mangel Pande as a hero and says, “every act I have undertaken in this war has been in the shadow of his example” (84).

Samad’s commitment to the legacy of his forefather prompts him to take action when the men learn that a young French prodigy, working for the Nazis, is sheltering in a nearby abandoned house. He and Archie kidnap Dr. Marc-Pierre Perret, but that is not sufficient for Samad. He tells Archie, “the very problem is that we need blood on our hands, you see? As an atonement” (99). This atonement, the blood, “is for [Samad] a symbol of his pedigree in a tradition of masculine heroism that stretches back to his great grandfather” (Gustar 336). Archie counters Samad’s stated intentions by claiming the war as “his” as an Englishman rather than Samad’s: “It’s England’s future we’ve been fighting for. For England, You know ... democracy and Sunday dinners, and ... and... promenades and piers, and bangers and mash—and the things that are ours. Not yours” (100). Samad and readers alike are led to believe that Archie goes through with the murder, but it is later revealed that Archie flipped his coin and Dr. Perret was spared. In short, Samad is more convinced of the doctor’s evil doing and certainly more decisive than Archie. He considers the murder an opportunity for a heroic deed, and although he indicts Nazi eugenics and urges Archie to kill the Nazi doctor, Samad “equates cultural intermixture with corruption and decadence” and thus echoes typical eugenicist discourse (Dawson 162).

### **The Name of the Father**

Samad Iqbal’s name is immensely important to him as a signifier of identity. He takes the Anglicization of his name—as “Sam”—as a verbal attack (Mirze 191). He

explains, “I’m not one of your English matey-boys. My name is Samad Miah Iqbal. Not Sam. Not Sammy. And not—God forbid—Samuel. It is Samad” (*WT* 94). Readers learn that only a few months after arriving in England, Samad wrote his last name in blood on a park bench in Trafalgar Square after suffering an injury at his workplace: “Slowly, with the dribbling blood, he wrote IQBAL from one bench leg to the next. Then, in an attempt to make it more permanent, he had gone over it again with a penknife, scratching it into the stone” (*WT* 418). It is in keeping with Samad’s belief in determinism that he works to make his mark permanent, irremovable from the spot. In analyzing his own behavior, Samad realizes that this small action was a way for him to participate in colonialism from the colonizer’s role. He “presumed” to try to “write [his] name on the world” just as Englishmen named streets after themselves (*WT* 418-9). Even though Samad fights against assimilation into English culture, “one can read this as an act of writing back, of asserting his marginalized identity in the topographical centre of the former Empire’s centre” (Dreyer 174). But any agency that Samad might have asserted by carving his name into the bench is subsumed into the narrative, as the recollection is not shared with readers from Samad’s point of view; rather, we hear the story second-hand as Samad told it to Millat. This significant moment for the father is relayed via the son.

Millat’s twin, Magid, follows in his father’s footsteps when he tries out the power of names. He tells “a group of ... white boys” that his name is “Mark Smith” (*WT* 126). This is a double blow to father Samad as Magid’s choice both eradicates the Iqbal cultural identity and dismisses the traditional handing-down of names from father to son. Samad yells, “I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME ... [...] AND YOU WANT TO BE CALLED MARK SMITH!” (*WT* 126). Naming is only one power that parents may exert

over their offspring, a capability that Archie's wife, Clara, describes as a "fearful responsibility, a godlike task for a mere mortal" (64). Samad tries to control the life of one of his sons. Fittingly, the chapter in which Magid and Millat are separated by their father is titled "Mitosis," a biological term used to describe the division and replication of a single cell. This title emphasizes that the boys are identical twins, and the changes that they experience after their separation can be attributed to their environments. Benedicte Page reads the second-generation twins as a "metaphor for the immigrant's split self" (qtd. in Dreyer 172), and John Clement Ball refers to Samad's actions as "twin-splitting experiment," motivated by "his desire to play God" (Ball 240-241). Thus, as Dawson indicates, "When he separates his twin sons, Samad is unwittingly engaging in an experiment similar to that used by biologists over the last half-century to assess the impact of genetic inheritance" (Dawson 163).

### **Magid and Millat**

The Iqbal boys share a common need with children of all times and places but particularly second-generation youth in England in the 1980s: the need to fit in or "belong." Vikki Bell, referencing Elspeth Probyn's 1996 *Outside Belongings*, explains that "the term 'belonging' allows an affective dimension—not just be-ing [sic], but longing;" a yearning is implied within the term (Bell 1). Millat is described in the text as a social chameleon, moving seamlessly among various social groups: "he stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden. In his mind he was as much there as he was here" (183). By the novel's end, however, his desire to truly BELONG leads him to join KEVIN (The Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation), a

fundamentalist Islamic group. Millat's expresses his mounting frustration with a seemingly endless list of racial stereotypes that he must confront in his everyday life:

He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelled of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives; that he could be a dentist or a shop-owner or a curry-shifter, but not a footballer or a filmmaker; that he should go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered. (194)

This lengthy passage reveals that Millat begins to embrace and imitate the stereotype that the dominant culture thrusts upon him. Smith continues, "In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country, until the week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized the anger, thought it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands" (194). As Charles Taylor writes, "The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized" (36). "What better way to solve an identity crisis than by adopting the ready-made one his opponents are constantly trying to impose on him?" (Mirze 197). In this way, Millat joins a gang that refuses to be alienated because of their religious affiliation; instead, they use the religion as a weapon in order to fight those that would alienate them.

Millat's particular brand of Islamic fundamentalism, however, draws upon gangster films popular in Western culture and values performance over substance. Magid and Millat's mother, Alsana, describes KEVIN from an outsider's perspective: "They call themselves followers of Islam, but they are nothing but thugs in a gang roaming Kilburn like all the other lunatics" (365). Those within the group particularly hold Millat in high regard because they are impressed with his "delivery of the thing. The presentation" (368). "As for KEVIN's more unorthodox programs of direct action, Millat was right in there, he was their greatest asset, he was in the forefront, the first into battle come jihad, cool as fuck in a crisis, a man of action, like Brando, like Pacino, like Liotta" (368). Millat knows that because of his religious commitment, he should stop drinking alcohol, stop listening to rap music. He should "purge [him]self of the taint of the West" (367), but "It was his most shameful secret that whenever he opened a door—a car door, a car trunk, the door of KEVIN's meeting hall, or the door of his own house just now—the opening of *GoodFellas* ran through his head and he found this sentence rolling around in what he presumed was his subconscious: As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster" (368). Millat demonstrates self-awareness, and even though he tries not to, he ends up revising the movie tagline in his mind to: "As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a Muslim" (369). The very aspect of Millat's identity that would set him apart from others, that could potentially provide him with personalized support, his Muslim identity, is actually a construct. Even the name KEVIN, an anagram that spells an Anglicized Irish, mocks any semblance of Islamic authenticity. It is a vehicle for violence and a way for Millat to live up to what Samad always says about him: he is the

“good-for-nothing son” (335). Millat’s anger is “not the righteous anger of a man of God, but the seething, violent anger of a gangster, a juvenile delinquent” (369).

The subplot of Millat’s involvement in KEVIN offers commentary on the Rushdie Affair,<sup>18</sup> a remarkable moment in late twentieth century multiculturalism. In 1997, Stanley Fish responded to Charles Taylor’s explanations of identity, mentioning “boutique multiculturalism”—a culture which accepts various cultures up to a point. Fish maintains, however, that “there are conflicts in which an intercultural dialogue is no longer possible” (Sommer 154). The Rushdie Affair is one of those moments. Those determined to protect freedom of speech and those adamantly decrying the blasphemy of the text could find no common ground. Simon Gikandi explains, “while the Rushdie affair did not create the crisis of English identity, it helped crystallize it more than any other cultural event in the 1990s” (24). Everyone was able to see, in the streets and on the news, the very real clash of cultures occurring in the aftermath of colonial rule.

Following the London bombings of July 2005—a series of coordinated suicide attacks targeting public transport carried out by Islamic terrorists—a *Newsweek* article reports, “Rather than following in their parents’ immigrant path of job and measured assimilation and growing material prosperity, many have instead turned to the religion of extremism for identity and life’s meaning” (Power et al. 21). Smith’s characterization of Millat then is true to life. For many young men like him, “the assumption of a new

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<sup>18</sup>Also known as *The Satanic Verses* controversy, The Rushdie Affair refers to instances of violence surrounding British author Salman Rushdie’s publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. According to John L. Esposito, editor of *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, “Many Muslim authorities decried the novel as blasphemous. Its sale and distribution were forbidden in India, Pakistan, South Africa, and Iran. Reactions became dramatic in early 1989 when Muslims in England burned copies of it and protest demonstrations in Pakistan ended in killings and injuries. On 14 February 1989 Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa placing a death sentence on the author and publishers for blasphemy against Islam, calling on Muslims everywhere to execute those associated with the novel.”



identity is part of a game, an attempt to become more visible against the English nationalists who are determined to keep the ‘purity’ of their nation” (Mirze 196).

Both sons, Magid and Millat, are dissatisfied with their lives; however, Millat focuses on anger and violence while Magid concentrates on realizing his desires. For just as Millat strives to find a group identity within KEVIN, Magid wants an English family. Once again, the lengthy sentence structure (using no less than five semi-colons), demonstrates the magnitude of his longing:

He wanted to own cats, not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; he wanted to have a trellis of flowers growing up on one side of the house instead of the ever-growing pike of other people’s rubbish; he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed’s car; he wanted to go on biking holidays to France, not day trips to Blackpool to visit aunties; he wanted the floor of his room to be shiny wood, not the orange-and-green swirled carpet left over from the restaurant; he wanted his father to be a doctor, not a one-handed waiter... (126).

The mantric repetition of “he wanted” emphasizes the magnitude of Magid’s desires, and his wishes align with English culture, specifically a middle to upper class English lifestyle. Freud tells us, “Small events in the child’s life which make him feel dissatisfied afford him provocation for beginning to criticize his parents, and for using in order to support his critical attitude, the knowledge which he has acquired that other parents are in some respects preferable to them” (237). Magid finds the Chalfens a more attractive set of parents than his biological ones. And in the above passage, we can see evidence of “the child’s imagination becom[ing] engaged in the task of getting free from the parents

of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing” (Freud 238). While Millat’s desire to belong leads him to radical Islam, Magid’s desires and rejection of his parents lead him to embrace intellectualism and atheism. Despite Samad’s efforts to send him to the homeland, Magid rejects religion of all forms in order to avoid the mistakes of his father. Consequently, the experiment to send Magid overseas is a failure in the eyes of Samad.

### **The Assimilation of Samad**

If, however, Samad believes in the inherited power of his bloodline—the legacy of Mangel Pande—then why does he feel the need to alter one of his boy’s environments in order to achieve the character he wants to see in his son? As a native-born Bengali living in England, Samad views the two cultures as dichotomous. He feels torn between his Eastern upbringing and the values of the Western world by which he is now surrounded. As Salman Rushdie describes a character in his collection of short stories, *East, West*, “her heart, roped by two different loves, was being pulled both East and West...” (Rushdie 209). Rather than accepting that Englishness can take many forms, Samad tries to deal with his split identity by attempting to compartmentalize his life—to separate his “western” choices from his “eastern” choices. One way in which he does this is by having an affair with a white woman, and of course, keeping her a secret from his family.

It is no coincidence that the lover is named “Poppy,” and that Smith clearly invites readers to examine the significance of the name. Samad thinks, “It is Poppy Burt-Jones. And just the name would be enough right now ... just the name would be enough to explode his mind” (172-3). This name, of course, reminds one of the flower that has

come to be associated with Remembrance Day on November 11 in the United Kingdom. Poppies feature prominently in a 1915 poem, “In Flanders Fields,” by the Canadian soldier John McCrae who served in World War I. After a friend died in battle, McCrae observed how poppies often flourished in the damaged soil of the Flanders battleground. Once published in *Punch*, the poem quickly gained widespread popularity. BBC News writes, “The poppy came to represent the immeasurable sacrifice made by his comrades and quickly became a lasting memorial to those who died in World War One and later conflicts. It was adopted by The Royal British Legion as the symbol for their Poppy Appeal, in aid of those serving in the British Armed Forces, after its formation in 1921” (“Why the Poppy?”). Given Samad’s experience as a soldier in World War II and his reluctance to fully assimilate into English life, this affair with “Poppy” illustrates his cultural and moral dilemma.

This extramarital affair exposes the religious element of Samad’s internal struggle as an immigrant father in England. Chapter 6 titled “The Temptation of Samad Iqbal” begins with a single word: “Children” (106). Samad has willingly fathered two boys, but the narrative explains that he was not prepared to truly know his children (106). Samad is heartbroken, guilty. He recognizes his failure to follow Islamic tenets, which makes him question his ability to guide his second-generation boys. He confides to Archie, “I kept thinking: how can I teach my boys anything, how can I show them the straight road when I have lost my own bearings?” (158). Z. Esra Mirze calls Samad’s rededication to Islam a “defense mechanism” to protect against assimilation (192), but in many ways, Samad has already assimilated. Chapter 3’s presentation of Samad at work as a waiter includes a number of references to English literature including Forster’s *A Passage to India* and

Dickens' *Uriah Heep*, indicating that in some ways Samad knows more about English culture than Archie does. Notably, Samad's assimilation into western culture is often aligned with religious thinking: "He was thinking like a Christian again" (129).

Samad is aware of how deeply immersed he is in western culture and desperately wants to modify his legacy by intervening in the lives of his sons. This intervention ostensibly takes the form of religious indoctrination. In *Nationalism*, however, Ernest Gellner reasons that "[nationalists] may value their faith because it is, allegedly, the expression of their national culture or character..." (77). He goes on to say, "they value religion as an aid to community, and not so much in itself" (77). I would argue that this logic applies to Samad as well. One of the few remaining links that Samad has to his homeland is the Islamic faith, and Samad begins to view English culture through an Islamist ethnocentric lens. "The more he feels his own identity fragmenting, the more Samad insists on imposing a rigidly conceived ethnic and religious identity on his sons" (Dawson 162-3). The superficiality of Samad's faith is not lost on his sons, however. In describing his father to Joyce Chalfen, Millat says, "he prays five times a day but he still drinks and he doesn't have any Muslim friends" (277). Unable to fully commit himself to Allah, Samad tries a bargaining strategy trading alcohol consumption for illicit sexual behavior. That bargaining reveals Samad's attempts of negotiation between eastern and western culture (117). With these tenuous compromises comes indecision, and as we have seen with Samad's hatred of Archie's coin flips, Samad despises indecisiveness.

Therefore, Samad is at his unhappiest when he is made aware of his in-between-ness. He is tormented by uncertainty about whether or not to continue his relationship with Poppy. He has trouble deciding which son to send to Bangladesh. After he sends

Magid away, Alsana punishes him with refusal to ever give him a decisive answer to any questions: “That was her promise, that was her curse upon Samad, and it was exquisite revenge” (178). Binary thinking like Samad’s suppresses opportunities for hybridity and ambiguity. As we have seen, Millat has the capacity to embrace his hybridity, but his father’s attitudes lead him to believe that hybridity is a personal failure, and he turns to KEVIN to find the acceptance his father refuses to give him.

Samad’s primary motivation for sending Magid away is fear. Samad struggles with his own identity, his religious beliefs, and his moral or immoral actions. When he perceives, however, that his sons may not even have that internal struggle, he springs into action. The culture that Samad willingly brought his children into may ultimately erase him and the cultural contributions he wishes to make to his sons’ upbringing. Samad’s efforts are misdirected, though, as he is out of touch with the current realities of his homeland. Smith makes a point of explaining that between 1971 and 1985, “more people died in Bangladesh, more people perished in the winds and the rain, than in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden put together” (176). Despite the fact that “everybody’s trying to get their family out of that mess back home” (169), Samad maintains that “those boys would have a better life back home” (166). Samad views Bangladesh in much the same way that Haroon Amir thinks of India in Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*; it is an imagined Bangladesh.

Both Samad and Alsana are frightened by the assimilation of their children and the loss of their original culture. Laura Moss argues that the fear of the older generation stems from the “ordinariness,” the normalization of cultural and racial hybridity. Specifically she states that contemporary multicultural London of *White Teeth* illustrates

that “Hybridity is no longer an exception to a concept of identity.” Further, “identity has been replaced by an acceptance, or at least acknowledgement, of a multiplicity of identities” (12). For Moss, it is the ubiquity of hybridity that most troubles the Iqbal parents. In describing Alsana’s fears, Smith writes,

But it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, *peanuts*, compared to what the immigrant fears—dissolution, *disappearance*. Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by visions of Millat (genetically *BB*; where *B* stands for Bengaliness) marrying someone called Sarah (*aa*, where *a* stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (*Ba*), who in turn marries somebody called Lucy (*aa*), leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great-grandchildren (*Aaaaaa!*), their Bengaliness thoroughly diluted, genotype hidden by phenotype.” (272)

I present this passage in its entirety to emphasize both Alsana’s fear and the narrative’s reference to genetic language. Samad, as we have seen, values genetic inheritance but works to supplement it by altering the environment of one of his sons. A third father in the text who has not yet been discussed at length is Marcus Chalfen, geneticist and colleague of Dr. Perret’s.

Marcus is depicted in contrast to Samad, and both Magid and Millat embrace him at times as a surrogate father. Marcus sees himself as very different from Samad, but he enjoys the children: “Funny thing about your family: first generation are all loony tunes, but the second generation have got heads just about straight on their shoulders” (290). Millat and Irie are originally sent to the Chalfen household for tutoring, but they spend

more and more time there during the second half of the novel. Marcus is working on a project for the Perret Institute: “FutureMouse©”. Magid and Marcus develop a strong bond by way of a “coincidental” pen pal relationship that is not accidental at all but due to the machinations of Joyce Chalfen. It is arguably this affiliation that drives Samad over the edge when it comes to Magid’s cultural identity—the way that Magid returns from Bangladesh “more English than the English” (*WT* 350).

Instead of making contact with Samad’s imagined Bangladesh, Magid adopts symbols connected to the power of colonial rule. Irie’s grandmother says that Magid’s clothes look like what “de Englishmen use ta wear back home in Jamaica, remember dat, Clarence?” (371). Magid’s “hair was floppy in the English public school style” (349), and Mickey says he “sounds like a right fuckin’ Olivier. Queen’s fucking English and no mistake” (371). In the preface to *Maps of Englishness*, Simon Gikandi describes a phenomenon he has witnessed in his home country of Kenya. Colonized people may detest the colonial power, even fight against it, but simultaneously believe in the “efficacy and authority of colonial culture” (xix). In Gikandi’s words, “the reason they were fighting colonial rule was not because they wanted to return to a precolonial past (in spite of the nationalist rhetoric gesturing that way) but because they wanted access to the privileges of colonial culture to be spread more equitably, without regard to race and creed” (xix). Magid sees the potential socioeconomic benefits of science and intellectualism. He discovers what Sigrun Meinig terms “the cult of rationality” in India (246). His pen pal relationship with Marcus, “in the great tradition of English education” (303), is a networking connection that could lead to success.

On the surface, Marcus and Samad appear to be two very different types of fathers: racially, culturally, and socio-economically. Marcus is optimistic, always looking to the future, while Samad clings to history. Millat observes of Marcus: “So there existed fathers who deals in the present, who didn’t drag ancient history around like a ball and chain. So there were men who were not neck-deep and sinking in the quagmire of the past” (271). Despite their difference they both share a dislike for chance; they both believe that they can control the future with their actions of today. Specifically, Marcus holds “a firm belief in the perfectibility of all life” (312). He believes if “You eliminate the random, you rule the world” (283). Samad perceives Marcus’s life work as an effort to play God: “Marcus Chalfen has no right. No right to do as he does. It is not his business. It is God’s business” (176). Clearly, Samad does not realize the irony in his accusations. As discussed above, Samad has, in his own way, attempted to play God by splitting his twin boys apart. His efforts to restore his family culture and protect his children from the aftermath of colonialism are “logically inscribed from the same point of view as that of colonialism” (Fanon 211).

While Samad’s God-playing is conducted on a domestic stage, Marcus’s efforts occur in the realm of genetic engineering. FutureMouse©, a young male (of course), “holds out the tantalizing promise of a new phase in human history, where we are not victims of the random but instead directors and arbitrators of our own fate” (357). The determination of FutureMouse©’s fate lies in its genes, but “Samad tries to determine his sons’ identity through transformation of their environment. This strategy is ironic given his earlier rebellion against Dr. Sick’s attempt to control human fate through eugenic engineering. As his wife notes, Samad frequently declares that Allah alone determines



people's fate, and yet he himself engages in overweening attempts to control the lives of others" (Dawson 163). Magid comes home dedicated to science and intellectualism. Millat, on the other hand—the son that Samad's often refers to as “the good-for-nothing son”(335)—does exactly what his father has glorified all along: he fires the gun in the novel's climax on New Year's Eve 1992. Millat proves himself to be a decisive agent of action, a Mangel Pande of the 20th century.

### **The Final Space**

My interpretation of Smith's complex tale thus far establishes that *White Teeth* rejects absolutes. National identity cannot be based on homogeneity because homogeneity is impossible (Mirze 200). Jonathan Sell writes, “For Smith it is patently absurd, and inhumane, to shoehorn identity into the narrative schemes of one culture to the exclusion of another...” (63). The characters of the novel that are represented as being caught between two extreme binaries must learn to live in the “in-between” and embrace chance, the accidental. “*White Teeth* ultimately takes ‘fundamentalist’ to be descriptive of any system of belief that seemingly relies on certainty” (Perfect 94).

Some of the more positive moments in the novel are presented as accidents. For example, Archie's meeting of Clara at the house of stranger on New Year's Day is described as “the entirely random, adventitious collision of one person with another. Something happened by accident. That accident was Clara Bowden” (19). As previously discussed, Smith presents a passage from Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* as the epigraph to Archie's section. It reads, “Every little trifle, for some reason, does seem incalculably important today, and when you say of a thing that 'nothing hangs on it,' it sounds like blasphemy. There's never any knowing—(how am I to put it?)—which of our

actions, which of our idlenesses won't have things hanging on it for ever.” The text celebrates the profound unpredictability and messiness of life, calling into question any attempts to impose order or limit possibilities.

Chapter 19, “The Final Space,” of *White Teeth* is the climax of the novel.<sup>19</sup> The place is a room in the Perret Institute, which seems to be a multicultural space where people of diverse backgrounds work side by side. Given that Archie experiences a symbolic rebirth with the coming of the New Year at the beginning of the novel, readers expect a similarly significant event to bookend the text. The time is therefore appropriate: New Year’s Eve, December 31, 1992. For Ashley Dawson, The Millennial Science Commission site for the FutureMouse© unveiling is similar to the White House press conference of February 12, 2001, which was organized by the Human Genome Project (Dawson 172). The similarities may serve to remind readers that significant work related to genetic engineering—and thus not far removed from eugenics—is not merely a fiction or a remnant of World War II (Dawson 149; 172). No matter how multicultural our world may look, our racialized history is far from over (Dawson 152-3).<sup>20</sup> Seven years of the mouse’s development has been pre-planned, but this “experiment in total planning and control—in the elimination of genes’ unpredictable effects on biological outcomes—is contaminated and destroyed by unforeseeable external factors” (Ball 240).

In the climactic scene of *White Teeth*, Archie takes the bullet meant for Marcus, but his bravery is entirely inadvertent. In fact, had Archie killed Dr. Perret when he had

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<sup>19</sup> For more in-depth analysis of how Smith uses physical descriptions of place, see Bhawana Jain’s “Multicultural Conviviality, Diasporic Tension and Local Spaces in *White Teeth*.” *Commonwealth*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2016, pp. 101-11.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed explanation of how the scientific community shifted the rhetoric of genetic engineering to disassociate it from eugenics, see Mindi McMann’s 2012 article, “British Black Box: A Return to Race and Science in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*.”

the chance, neither the Perret Institute nor FutureMouse© might exist. As the mouse escapes, Archie says to it, “Go on, my son” (448). The mouse “manages to evade its predetermined narrative” just as “Archie’s coin evades the imperatives of fundamentalism” (Bentley 500). The expression “Go on, my son” can be one of encouragement or disbelief. The closing lines of *White Teeth* describe how randomly the mouse scurries here and there: “[Archie] watched [the mouse] scurry away, over his hand. He watched it dash along the table, and through the hands of those who wished to pin it down. He watched it leap off the end and disappear through an air vent” (*WT* 448). The random scurry of the mouse emphasizes that “chance definitely rules out overdetermination” (Mellet 198-9) just as—despite his best efforts—Samad could not force a set culture identity upon his sons.

### **The Next Generation**

As Millat plans to assassinate Marcus Chalfen, creator of FutureMouse©, the narration suggests that he has a different mindset than that of his father: “He liked to think he had a different attitude, a second-generation attitude. If Marcus Chalfen was going to write his name all over the world, Millat was going to write his BIGGER. There would be no misspelling his name in the history books. There’d be no forgetting the dates and times. Where Pande misfooted he would step sure. Where Pande chose A, Millat would choose B” (419). This scene elucidates Millat’s difficult relationship with history and his cultural heritage. When he seeks out and reexamines “IQBAL” scratched into the park bench, a blood-like color of “murky rust” (418), he feels “nothing but contempt” (419).

When Samad first takes Millat to see that carved name—much like Simon Dedalus takes Stephen to the lecture hall to see those carved initials, “S.D”—he explains the action to his son. Samad associates his name-carving deed with an effort towards assimilation. He says, “It meant I wanted to write my name on the world. It meant I presumed. Like the Englishmen who named streets in Kerala after their wives, like the Americans who shoved their flag in the moon. It was a warning from Allah. He was saying: Iqbal, you are becoming like them. That’s what it meant” (418-9). Millat rejects this explanation in a spirit of rebellion, responding mentally to his father, “no, that’s not what it meant. It just meant you’re nothing.” (419). Millat believes that his life is full of possibilities. He has opportunity to correct the mistakes of his ancestors. But with the shot fired at the Perret Institute, Millat has ironically become what Samad always wanted: a twentieth century Mangel Pande.

Like the room at the Perrett Institute, Irie’s womb is a space of possibility.<sup>21</sup> The potential multiculturalism of a child conceived by Irie and Millat is foreshadowed in chapter 9, in which Irie has an unrequited crush on Millat. He asks her to imagine what their kids would look like, and she says, “I think they’d look nice.” Millat, however, has a different opinion that emphasizes the physical characteristics: “Brown-black. Blacky-brown. Afro, flat nose, rabbit teeth, and freckles. They’d be freaks!” (190). The third-generation is introduced into the story with the birth of Irie’s child—a child who “could also be regarded as an embodiment of Homi Bhabha’s concept of third space and hybridity, which transcends fixed dichotomies and cultural hierarchies” (Dreyer 176).

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<sup>21</sup>Irene Pérez-Fernández refers to “the final cathartic space where all the characters are brought together to witness Professor Marcus Chalfen’s FutureMouse© experiment” as “the ultimate space of possibility” (151).

In addition to being a space of possibility, Irie's womb is a place of uncertainty. She does not know whether Magid or Millat is the father.<sup>22</sup> Smith as narrator writes that Irie's child seems "a perfectly plotted thing with no real coordinates" (*WT* 427). "In Irie's mind at least, her child's genetics will no longer determine that child's fate" (Braun 232). The first-generation strives for fixity while the second-generation proves more flexible (Dreyer 176). Michael Perfect interprets Irie's child as a convergence of *White Teeth*'s large cast of characters. The child will "have white British (Archie), black Caribbean (Clara) and Bengali (the Iqbals) heritage. [...] It is Irie's child, then, that not only connects the families but also, for all the tensions between (and within) them, ensures their continued connectedness in the future" (Perfect 82). Fernández reads the baby as "a symbol of the ultimate indeterminacy of identity" (152).

### ***The Autograph Man***

In the Inaugural Philip Roth Lecture<sup>23</sup> on October 27, 2016, Zadie Smith said, "It seems to me that people experiencing impossible identities—who find it impossible to imagine being, for example, Muslim and gay, or Jewish and obscene, or black and nerdy, or female and perverse, or Protestant and Irish—can build up a terrible tension within themselves" (341). This specific type of tension is thoroughly explored in Smith's sophomore novel, *The Autograph Man*, published two years after *White Teeth*.

While *White Teeth* has enjoyed critical acclaim, *The Autograph Man* has been widely viewed as disappointing. In *The London Review of Books*, James Wood describes

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<sup>22</sup> Fiona Tolan notes that with the birth of Irie's child, *White Teeth* ends like E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*, "on the birth of a 'fatherless' child who embodies connection, eschews conservative tradition, and augers the future" (139).

<sup>23</sup> This lecture has since been published as "The I Who Is Not Me" in Smith's 2018 collection of essays, *Feel Free*.

the book's protagonist, Alex-Li Tandem, who has a Jewish mother and a Chinese father, as "a dreary blank, an empty centre entirely filled by his pop-culture devotions. Around him swirls a text incapable of ever stiffening into sobriety, a flailing, noisy hash of jokes, cool cultural references, pull-quotes, lists and roaring italics. It is like reading a newspaper designed by a kindergarten." If, however, Alex is considered in conjunction with the some of the themes established in *White Teeth*, his relationship with his father and his journey to self-discovery become more significant. I am not the first to look at connections between the two novels. Jonathan Sell considers the philosophy of identity in both texts and argues that characters in *White Teeth* are able to "don and doff identities at will" (62), but in *The Autograph Man*, identity is composed of gestures. Tracey K. Parker sees *The Autograph Man* as an extension of Smith's "exploration of the meaning and value of popular culture in the contemporary subject's life, a journey [Smith] began with her first novel" (69). As someone who buys and sells autographs of famous individuals for his livelihood, Alex is largely defined by his connections to popular culture.

The way that Alex is consumed with popular culture is established well before he ever becomes a buyer and seller of autographs, when he is a child in the book's prologue. On a car journey to a wrestling match, Alex's father, Li-Jin, overhears the dialogue between Alex and his friends. He does not understand what they are talking about: "References to programs he's never watched, songs he's never heard, films that came and went without him noticing" (6). This conversational currency follows Alex and his friends into adulthood. For example, Adam reminds Alex, "There are other people in this film we call life" (52).

Despite generational differences, Alex and his father share a critical bond. Li-Jin is described as his son's "best friend" (4). He has maternal qualities and loves Alex "in a feminine way instead of a masculine" (12). This foundational relationship in Alex's life is suddenly removed when Li-Jin dies from a brain tumor—right in front of Alex—in the dizzying aftermath of attendance at a wrestling match. *The Autograph Man* cannot be considered a Bildungsroman because readers do not follow Alex through his adolescent, formative years. Readers see him only as a child at the wrestling match and then the narrative fast forwards to Alex in his early twenties, living alone with his cat, working, and negotiating friendships and romantic relationships.

As an individual with agency, however, Alex is failing. He is unable to create anything new or uniquely his. For instance, when he makes up songs, they are not original. He just changes the lyrics to top 40 hits. He has fathered a child, but it was aborted. It gradually becomes clear that Alex has developed intense anxiety associated with death because of his traumatic childhood event. His fears lead him to engage in a number of avoidance techniques. He is high from marijuana and/or drunk for most of the narrative, but perhaps his most successful and deeply rooted evasion strategy is his immersion in popular culture. Unwilling to face the disappointments of his real life, Alex escapes into films and television; "the great tragedy of his heart was that it always needed to be told a story" (85).

Alex's primary motivation in life is to obtain an autograph from his favorite actress, Kitty Alexander, an older Russian-American woman living in New York City. As Parker writes, "By adoring celebrities from afar Alex-Li risks neither loss nor rejection" (73). After years of writing fruitless requests for the autograph, he develops a new tactic:

creating an imaginary relationship with her via letter. Instead of asking for anything, he writes to Kitty about Kitty, telling her about herself. For example, one letter reads, “Dear Kitty, When behind a young man on a bus, she finds herself staring at his neck. The urge to touch it is almost overwhelming! And then he scratches it, as if he knew. Love, Alex-Li Tandem” (128). This is the one area in his life at which Alex is creatively successful. His entreaties ultimately result in Kitty sending an autograph, which his friends do not believe to be authentic. The actress compliments him on his writing when they meet saying, “You write better than you speak,” (233). She has even committed one her favorite letters to memory (240).

In addition to abusing substances and obsessing over Kitty, Alex has been working on a book for years that he hopes to one day publish: *Jewishness and Goyishness*, modeled on the work of comedian Lenny Bruce. Alex considers it a research hobby to categorize all manner of things like “Foods, Clothes, The nineteenth century, Cars, Body parts, The lyrics of John Lennon, Books, Countries, Journey, Medicines” as Jewish or goyish. Like Samad in *White Teeth*, Alex attempts to understand his subject position with a binary mindset. When readers first meet the adult Alex at the beginning of chapter 1, the first line is “You’re either for me or against me thought Alex-Li Tandem, referring to the daylight, and, more generally to the day” (40). Alex is “determined to shape what ... is fundamentally without any shape” (279). Alex, like Samad, discovers that his model will not hold. It is inadequate to classify the complexities of modern life. In an allusion to one of the book’s epigraphs, which quotes Franz Kafka in a letter to his father, Smith writes, “Life is not just symbol, Jewish or goyish. Life is more than just a



Chinese puzzle. Not everything fits. Not every road leads to epiphany. This isn't TV, Alex, this isn't TV" (151).<sup>24</sup>

An autograph, referred to as "expensive signifiers" by reviewer James Wood, is worthless without authenticity. When genuine, Alex believes that signatures reveal the essence of an individual. An autograph is an inscription of the self, writing one's identity into a particular place and time. Alex likens the value of an autograph to sexual purity: "A woman who gives up her treasure with too much frequency is not coveted by men" (56). When someone gives too freely, they become easy, worthless. When, carefully withheld, however, they gain worth.

If an autograph is significant to selfhood, it is no coincidence then that Alex's signature is called into questions many times: once when a friend of a friend accepts Alex's business card. He says, "Call that a signature? Alex ... what? I can't read that" (65). Similarly, a subway clerk accepts a payment from Alex via credit card and studies the signature suspiciously (74). Alex's signature becomes more and more illegible as the narrative progresses. A colleague in the autograph business responds to it: "Call that a signature? Looks like a bloody scrawl to me" (148). Like his identity, Alex's autograph is difficult to understand.

Finally, just before Alex takes a trip to the United States to hopefully meet Kitty Alexander, he has what is described as a "psychotic interlude" (153). He comes to realize "Life is more than just a Chinese puzzle. Not everything fits. Not every road leads to epiphany. This isn't TV, Alex, this isn't TV" (151). He goes on to remind himself three

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<sup>24</sup>The original quotation presented in the epigraph is "Naturally things cannot in reality fit together the way the evidence does in my letter; life is more than a Chinese puzzle." The second epigraph is quotation from Marilyn Monroe and also invokes the importance of fatherhood: "I would always make believe that Clark Gable was my father."

more times that “YOU ARE NOT WATCHING TV” (152). It is immediately following this psychological event that Alex’s signature—his own autograph representative of his identity—diminishes into seemingly meaningless symbols. Rather than signing his name on a check, he draws “a shaky table, a catcher’s mitt, the bottom half of a chair” (159). Alex’s signature devolving into random drawings at the same time his mental state is deteriorating illustrates that the signature is symbolic of the self.

Consequently as Alex begins to face his fear of death near the end of *The Autograph Man* and (finally) engages in a grieving ritual for the loss of Li-Jin, his signature is restored. A key scene during which Alex internally grapples with mortality occurs when he visits a dying friend in the hospital, Brian Duchamp. While sitting with his old autograph trading partner, Alex is “unable to take his mind or eyes off the man in the next bed, who was much, much too young to be in this place” (307). Alex feels that this “out-of-place youth” is “obscene” and an aspersion to his “own sense of himself” (307). When Alex comes back to the moment—after questioning God and lamenting the deaths of infants in his mind—he says goodbye to Brian and they share a simple moment as “Autograph Men again,” just doing business. Alex writes a check and Duchamp examines it: “Paid to the order of Brian Duchamp. That’s me. Though *Gawd* only knows when I’ll ‘ave a chance to spend it. Signed by Alex-Li Tandem,’ he said, taking a finger and pressing it gently to Alex’s write. ‘That’s *you*’” (308). In direct contrast to the signature provided to Dr. Huang in the aftermath of his breakdown, it is implied that this signature is legible; it is an intelligible impression of Alex’s identity.

Two scenes at the end of the novel show the progress that Alex has made in both coming to terms with his father’s death and finding a sense of purpose in his life. Both

scenes involved Alex entering into a symbolic dialogue with others who have a significant connection to Li-Jin. According to Charles Taylor's dialogical character theory, "We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. Even after we outgrow some of these others—our parents, for instance—and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live" (Taylor 33).

An illustration at the beginning of the text depicts a kabbalistic Tree of Life that Alex has constructed on his wall. Several of the nodes feature names legitimately associated with the kabbalistic Jewish philosophy: Tif'eret, Yesod, Shechinah. Others, however, stem from Alex's love of popular culture; figures such as Franz Kafka, John Lennon, Bette Davis, and Jimmy Stewart also appear. There is one blank position at the top of Alex's Kabbalah. With the support of his best friend, Adam, who knew Li-Jin and was present at the time of his death, Alex places a note—representative of his father—in this primary position.

The note in question is a one-pound banknote signed by Li-Jin, given to each of the boys to settle a bet at the fateful wrestling match from the novel's prologue. Alex makes the meaningful gesture of adding the note to the Kabbalah only after Adam brings to his attention the similarities between Li-Jin's signature and Alex's signature. Alex remembers that he "used to copy his" (340). He continues, "I'd make him write it out so I could copy it. I'd make him write it over and over again, so I could watch the way his hand moved" (340). The significance of the name of the father written by the father calls to mind Millat's journey to view the carved name "Iqbal" on a London bench. The signature is representative of the father's attempt to inscribe his identity on to a specific

moment in time—to quite literally “make his mark” on the world around here. It is the son’s responsibility to carry that message, whatever it may be, with all of its complexities and contradictions, forward into the future.

Each of the boys has held on to his signed note from Li-Jin, and every year on the anniversary of Li-Jin’s death, Adam requests Alex to say the Kaddish. Until now, Alex has refused, but the final scene of *The Autograph Man* depicts Alex observing the Yahrzeit of Li-Jin, surrounded by his friends. Three of the men at the Yahrzeit knew Li-Jin and were present the night of his death. Alex’s romantic partner, also present, has a special connection to Li-Jin because he fitted her with a pacemaker when she was a child. Readers see that Alex will now carry on a symbolic relationship with Li-Jin through his real life friends—no longer needing to invent relationships out of popular culture. Perhaps more than any other character in this study of fathers and sons, Alex-Li-Tandem demonstrates Charles Taylor’s theory of dialogical character. Taken together, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* and *The Autograph Man* demonstrate the important role a father, whether present or absent, may have in the identity formation of a son.

## CONCLUSION

The introduction of this dissertation defines “identity” in accordance with Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor who writes in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), “The full definition of someone’s identity ... involves not only his moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community” (36). One’s membership in a community begins with family; therefore, this study has looked to the time-honored trope of the father and son relationship in selected literary works from the twentieth century with an eye to the “national” component of one’s identity. What makes a person identify with a community of others? What makes him or her say “I am English,” for example, or “I am Indian,” or “I am American”?

These affiliations are much more than words or boxes to check on official forms. As briefly touched upon in Chapter 3, loyalties to the concept of nation lead millions to war, sometimes to certain death as in the case of kamikaze pilot fighters in World War II. Devotion to one group above all others can spring from religion with equal fervor as in the case of Islamic jihadists. What may be called “issues of national identity” permeate the culture of many sovereign countries today, the United States and the United Kingdom being chief among them. The UK’s forthcoming withdrawal from the European Union indicates a concern about protecting national identity, and in his successful bid for the US presidency in 2016, Donald Trump called for increased security at US/Mexican borders, claiming that Mexicans are dangerous criminals: “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (qtd. in Elving). These unfounded generalizations work to frighten the public and alienate people of color. Such rhetoric is evident in mainstream media, but in some cases the fears have festered to

a point of hatred. What is known as the Great Replacement is a white nationalist conspiracy theory attributed to the work of French writer Renaud Camus. “The great replacement is very simple,” Mr. Camus has said. “You have one people, and in the space of a generation you have a different people” (qtd. in Charlton). Replacement theory cautions that changing demographics and migration are supplanting white populations with people of color. Scholars such as Cecil Jenkins have dismissed the theory, calling it “a paranoid fantasy” (Jenkins 342), but the fear at its core—the inclusionary/exclusionary language and behaviors surrounding racial prejudice—is rooted in the family unit: in what has come before, represented by ancestors, and what will come after, represented by the current sons and daughters.

The father and son relationship has long been used in literature to convey meaning about generational conflict and to comment upon changes in culture and traditions. In this dissertation, I have shown that writers of the twentieth century continue to employ this archetype to explore the problems of national identity and belonging in anticolonial Ireland and postcolonial Britain. In a 1992 contribution to the *Times Literary Supplement*, Irish writer and scholar Declan Kiberd invokes a line from Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*: “If a man has been denied a good father he had better go out and manufacture one” (6). James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus does just that as he is disillusioned with his biological father and all that he represents. As the Irish people fought for independent nationhood at the turn of the 20th century, a need for a unique artistic consciousness arose. Stephen wishes to articulate that consciousness, to fulfill the destiny of his namesake, fashioning his own identity and choosing to father himself with the aid of a complex, modern man: Leopold Bloom. Hanif Kureishi’s Karim Amir is on a

similar journey as he works to become a creator of culture via dramatic performance. Karim's father, unlike Simon Dedalus, is able to nurture his son's progress. Haroon and Karim share the experience of double consciousness, living both inside and outside of British culture, and the father is able to model behavior that will facilitate Karim's assimilation.

Not every son in this study, however, can be considered an "artist" in the same way that Stephen is an artist or the way that Karim specializes in the dramatic arts. For instance, neither Magid nor Millat Iqbal is an artist; Alex-Li Tandem signing his name legibly in the style of Li-Jin does not make him an artist. But, as Charles Taylor explains, "We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression" (32). Language can include forms of expression like "'languages' of art, of gesture, of love, and the like" (32). We do not acquire these languages on our own. We learn them from significant others—our friends and family members.

In Zadie Smith's debut novel, at the turn of the 21st century, Samad Iqbal denies the complexity of his identity and creates oversimplified binaries that are inadequate for today's modern, multicultural societies. As Zadie's Smith's epigraph to *White Teeth* indicates in its invocation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "What is past is prologue." Shakespeare's Antonio speaks this line as he encourages Sebastian to murder his father. Samad Iqbal's inability to accept his multifaceted identity is a hindrance to his sons' survival in today's modern, multicultural world. Fathers, throughout literature, often represent history, authority, forces that are ultimately divisive rather than unifying. Our present is necessarily influenced by history—our sons are affected by fathers—but, that

past is only a beginning, an introduction, that may be altered as children mature and cultures evolve.



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## VITA

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