

Identity and Cultural Translation in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

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Abstract

An act of literary translation is normatively perceived as bridging two cultures and contributing to the dissemination of knowledge. Even then, the act and efficacy of translations have always raised eyebrows, in the sense that critics and readers alike have wondered if at all an act of faithful translation would be possible, and what would the “losses” in the process imply. With the onrush of globalisation and the world apparently shrinking due to the dissolving of borders, translations are no longer limited to the literary-textual realm, but have taken a cultural turn. Following the theoretical frameworks of Susan Bassnett, Harish Trivedi and Homi K. Bhabha, citizens of the postnational world networked by the asymmetrical flow of labour and capital, are now looking at translated individuals, who find themselves in a no man's land, located somewhere uncomfortably between their long lost home and nostalgia, and their new found home and identity. In this article, I want to explore the phenomenon of cultural translation, keeping in mind Salman Rushdie's assertion that we are all "translated men" (*Imaginary Homelands* 17) and how translation is not merely related to the literary and the textual, but especially to the socio-cultural and political, especially in this globalised transnational world which we are slowly moving into. I propose that cultural translation allows us to resist the homogenisation of culture and countries and the effacing of individual notions of history and belonging and how it is the call of the hour, a necessary imperative in a world which is being globally reduced to insular singulars along the lines of race, class, caste, ethnicity.

Keywords

Translation, Cultural Translation, Globalisation, British Fiction, Zadie Smith, Identity, Hybridity