

Sameness and Selfhood in Lived Experience: A Ricoeurian Reading of *NW*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the application of Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity to Zadie Smith's novel *NW*. Ricoeur's distinction between *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (self-hood) provides a framework for understanding the fragmented identities of Smith's characters, who navigate the tensions between continuity and transformation in contemporary urban life. Through nonlinear storytelling, shifting perspectives, and stylistic experimentation, *NW* dramatizes the instability of identity and the role of narrative in configuring temporal experience. Characters such as Natalie/Keisha, Leah, and Felix exemplify Ricoeur's claim that identity is constituted through narrative reconfiguration, as they reinterpret their pasts and assume responsibility for their choices. Moreover, the novel situates personal identity within collective

histories of race, class, and migration, highlighting the ethical and communal dimensions of narrative identity. By looking at NW through Ricoeur's ideas, this study shows how stories help us to understand who we are, how we remember, and how we build our sense of identity today.

Keywords: Zadie Smith, Self-hood and sameness, Memory, Narrative identity.
