

A novel swinging back and forth through time

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

Set in the North of London in the beginning, Zadie Smith's fifth novel, "Swing Time", tells us the story of two childhood friends whose paths diverge as they grow up, and the challenges of growing up fuel the diversion.

The unnamed narrator, from an English father and Jamaican mother, is drawn towards Tracey, who has an English mother and has no father since they are the only black students in their dance class. They become best friends through time as they find solace in their mutual skin tones and they are neighbours from the estate flats as well. While Tracey is a confident and talented dancer to whom dance moves are like conscience, the narrator faces challenges

since she has flat feet. The narrator is highly expected by her mother to outdo Tracey in dancing but she constantly fails, which results in creating a void between a mother-daughter relationship.

Tracey rises to the momentary fame of a talented dancer and ultimately ends up in the poverty stricken life where she began with. The frustration growing from this event ultimately leads to a mental disorder in Tracey.

Later on in life, the narrator becomes the personal assistant of popstar Aimee, after graduating. As Aimee sets up a charity programme in West Africa, the narrator along with Aimee's whole crew fly to London, New York, and West Africa frequently. Through time, the West African village becomes a familiar ground for the narrator as she makes friends and

grows a temporary romantic interest. The novel further unfurls the poor condition of Tracey - she has kids from different men, and her mental disorder takes a serious toll on her. The narrator's mother succeeds in becoming a member of the Parliament in London, and she is diagnosed with cancer in the greater half of the book. She restores her normal bond with her mother and tries to stem some unfading memories since her chances of survival are less.

I, personally, felt Zadie's novelist gaze was able to cut the gloom and shed light on gender, racial, and cultural issues. Her narratives are strong and thought provoking. The way she portrayed the stigma surrounding black people in a white-majority country, friendship and trust issues, mental health problems,

corruption in work places honestly intrigued me to the core. I wasn't expecting this much before delving into the novel. Considering this is her inaugural first person driven novel, she did a pretty amazing job constantly shifting from the past to the future and vice versa.

Overall, I think her writings are urgent for this generation to read, and Swing Time definitely lived up to its name on the shortlist for 2017 Man Booker Prize. Though it is anything but a light read, you need this book on your to-be-read list.

Shah Tazrian Ashrafi is angry with his parents because they won't buy him a golden retriever. Help him convince his parents at [facebook.com/shahtazrianashrafi](https://www.facebook.com/shahtazrianashrafi)

The Rapunzel Struggles

ZARIN REZWANA

When television commercials showed long silky hair, the young me would drool and dream. I always wanted to have luscious locks, and achieved them at one point. The moment of truth though, came up when I had to maintain it - thus managing to not look like I have a bird's nest fitted on my head. Apart from fact that I have lost count of how many hairbands I lose every day, here are a few cons of having long hair.

THE HAIR CARE CHRONICLES

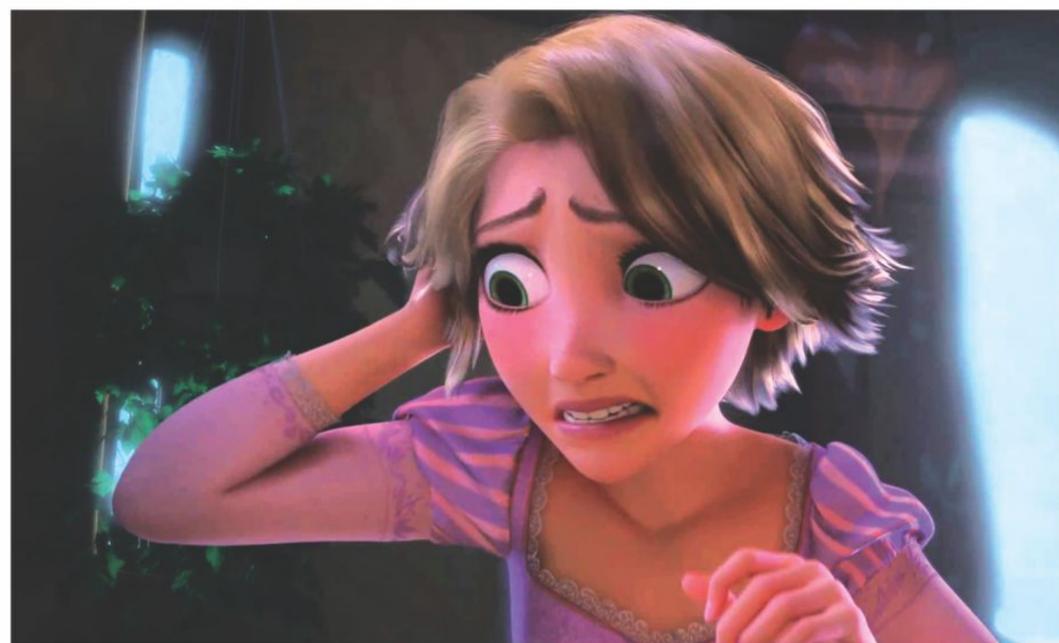
The necessities of hair care lengthen as it grows. This means, you need more oiling, more shampooing, more conditioning and so on. The misery is that drying the huge wet mass feels like an entire day's work. Crucial time management has to be done before deciding whether to wash the hair or not. Otherwise, bid adieu to a good hair day. Also, please take into notice that it takes a great deal of courage to endure oiled hair. It feels like the surrounding air becomes pungent with the smell of *narikel tel* in no time. On the other hand, the struggle is necessary. Otherwise, get ready to shed some dandruff, not to mention the hair fall.

ATTACHMENT ISSUES

There are times when you let your hair free, but it finds something to hold on to. You can never let go and submit to the guilty pleasures of dancing to Bollywood songs as well because of possible hair pulls. Long hair binds to curtains, bag zippers, dangly earrings and we can let the list go on. It can also be the other way around, where stuff like pens and sunglasses are much too attracted to the hair. Tying your hair is never really a solution because you end up looking like a pineapple or getting a headache. So we come to the conclusion that handling long hair is a battle itself. With your long braid, therefore, you are a *Dothraki Khal* too.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL

No one minds a windy day when the breeze is a respite from the scorching sun. Well then, when the tufts of beloved locks cover your face, priorities begin to shift. Don't get me started on the multiplier effect of heat from the lot of hair because there are enough summer rants already. Similarly, washing your hair on a rainy day means that it will never dry by itself. Humidity never leaves anyone alone, and especially not your hair. As



the two weeks of winter come along, you get a bad case of hair frizz. Basically, as Ariana Grande said to her hair, I too, have one less problem without it.

THE NEVER ENDING LOVE

Whatever the length, having luscious locks are one of the best things that can happen to anyone. No one ever says they do not like their hair, no matter how much they hate everything else.

Nonetheless, my grandmother gave me a look of utter sadness and disappointment when she saw my bob. It reminded me how hard it was to see precious tufts fall to the ground when you get a haircut. This now gets me thinking whether this article is my way of self-consolation. But it isn't.

I am better off without long hair. Or am I?