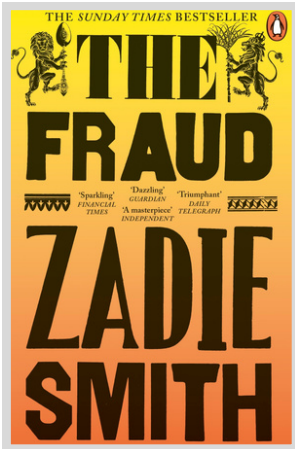


# The Fraud by Zadie Smith



## Summary

In her first historical novel, Zadie Smith transports the reader to a Victorian England transfixed by the real-life trial of the Tichborne Claimant, in which a cockney butcher, recently returned from Australia, lays claim to the Tichborne baronetcy, with his former slave Andrew Bogle as the star witness. Watching the proceedings, and with her own story to tell, is Eliza Touchet - cousin, housekeeper and perhaps more to failing novelist William Harrison Ainsworth. From literary London to Jamaica's sugarcane plantations, Zadie Smith weaves an enthralling story linking the rich and the poor, the free and the enslaved, and the comic and the tragic.

*Provided by Penguin Random House*

## About the Author

Zadie Smith was born in north-west London in 1975 and holds a degree in English Literature from the University of Cambridge. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a member of the American Academy of Letters and has twice been listed as one of Granta's '20 Best Young British Novelists'. Her first novel, *White Teeth*, was the winner of The Whitbread First Novel Award, The Guardian First Book Award, The James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction, and The Commonwealth Writers' First Book Award. Her novel, *The Fraud*, was published in September 2023.

*Provided by RCW Literary Agency website:*  
<https://www.rcwlitagency.com/authors/smith-zadie/>

## Historical Background

### **Victorian England:**

During this period, a rapidly growing middle class began shaping societal values, placing greater emphasis on family life and marriage based on romantic love. The home was increasingly viewed as a private environment, with women expected to focus on domestic responsibilities. At the same time, the feminist movement emerged, beginning with the first organized efforts in the 1850s and marked by milestones such as the Married Women's Property Acts passed between 1870 and 1893. Religion also played a significant role, with the Evangelical Movement promoting a strong moral code that encouraged charity, personal responsibility, and self-improvement. Popular culture of the time reflected middle-class tastes, with widely enjoyed reading materials such as novels, women's magazines, children's literature, and newspapers. Leisure activities often centered around the home, including table games, as well as domestic travel for recreation and relaxation.

*Source Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian\\_era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_era)*

### **Jamaica:**

The Crown Colony of Jamaica and its dependencies was established after the English Protectorate captured the island from the Spanish Empire in 1655. Jamaica formally became a British colony in 1707 and was designated a Crown colony in 1866. For much of British rule, the island's economy relied heavily on sugarcane production, sustained by the forced labor of enslaved Africans who endured some of the most brutal conditions in the world. Numerous slave rebellions took place throughout this period, and Jamaica ultimately gained independence in 1962.

*Source Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony\\_of\\_Jamaica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Jamaica)*

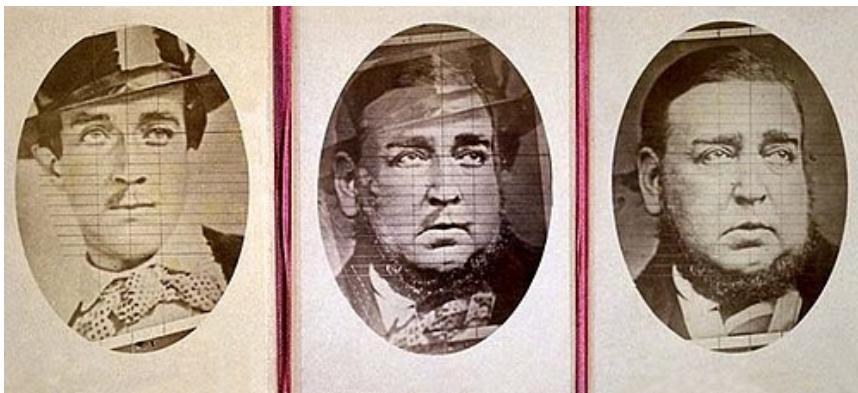
## Discussion Questions

1. The novel explores the concept of fraudulence in many ways. Which character did you think was the biggest "fraud" and why? What did their story reveal about the human condition?
2. Why do you think Smith chose to center the novel around the historical Tichborne case? What parallels does she draw between the case and broader Victorian attitudes?
3. We see several Victorian era novelists portrayed as rather ridiculous or even untalented. What point do you think Smith is trying to make by satirizing famous writers like Dickens and Thackeray?
4. How does *The Fraud* explore the notion of "truth"? What competing ideas about truth emerge between the different characters?
5. Discuss the different impacts of respectability, prejudice and the rigid class system on characters like Eliza Touchet and Andrew Bogle. How does this inform their worldviews?
6. What did you make of Sarah Ainsworth's staunch defense of the Claimant? What does her support reveal about Victorian society and enduring attitudes about social class?
7. The novel shows the ways Eliza subtly undermines gender constraints while maintaining social propriety. Analyze the complexity of her position
8. When Bogle shares stories of his father's enslavement, how does Smith's writing style shift? What's the impact of scenes told from Bogle's point of view?
9. Explore the theme of storytelling itself within the novel. Why is Eliza so skeptical of novelists? What point is Smith making about fiction and who is entitled to tell a story?

*Questions Courtesy of bookclubs.com*

## Discussion Questions

10. The Fraud touches on issues like colonialism, slavery and institutional prejudice that still resonate today. What parallels did you notice between the Victorian era and modern society?
11. Analyze Smith's choice to include so many real historical figures and events. How does factual history interact with fictional narrative?
12. Discuss your reactions to the novel's ending. Do you think Eliza is on the cusp of personal change, or will she remain limited by societal constraints and her own blindspots?
13. The novel has a non-linear structure with shifting perspectives and timelines. Did you find this effective? What was the impact on your reading experience?
14. If you've read Zadie Smith's other novels, how does The Fraud compare in terms of style, characters and themes? Which of her books is your favorite and why?



The blended image (centre) was said by the Claimant's supporters to prove that Roger Tichborne (left, in 1853) and the Claimant (right, in 1874) were one and the same person.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tichborne\\_case](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tichborne_case)