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Homage and Revision: Zadie Smith's Use of E.M. Forster in *On Beauty*

This paper aims to assess the transformative use that Zadie Smith makes of E.M. Forster's classic *Howards End* in her latest novel, analysing the convergences and divergences between both works. The key to Smith's transformation of her intertext lies not only in the formal and thematic surplus of her work, but also in the connections that she makes with social comedies other than Forster's. The essay demonstrates that *On Beauty* pays homage to an admired author, but also to the literary tradition of the English novel in which Smith inscribes her work. The analysis will also show how *On Beauty* throws light on aspects of its intertext and of Forster's own politics which remain critically under-examined.

It is not surprising that Zadie Smith should be included in surveys of contemporary British novelists (Childs 2005, Lane 2003) alongside Will Self, Martin Amis or Angela Carter, as well as in monographs such as Kadija Sesay's *Write Black, Write British* where she is in the company of Andrea Levy or Benjamin Zephaniah. As Dominic Head has noted, born to a Jamaican mother and English father, Smith belongs to a British-born generation of writers who have not had first-hand experience of migration and rootlessness. Rather than denouncing racism, her debut novel *White Teeth* "presents the social problems of ethnicity as the shared problems of a diverse citizenship with a common home" (Head 107-108). Paul Gilroy explains that despite the enduring presence of racism and inequality in British society, a "convivial" culture has emerged through the processes of "cohabitation and interaction" that have taken place over time (xi). In an effort to reflect these changes, the *Wasafiri* 2002 special issue on Black-British writing is aptly called "Writing in Britain: Shifting Geographies," stressing the fact that although black voices have reshaped the literary landscape of the nation, they are now part of "the whole picture (whatever its colours)" of British writing (Nasta 3). In an interview at a Californian radio station following the publication of her latest novel *On Beauty* (2005), Smith speaks about her Englishness in terms of commitment and bonding to her country of birth: "I consider myself very English but that's because I care for England, I care for its literature and its film, its poetry, its people, its food, its landscape" (Wolinsky). Smith's concern for England is nowhere more evident than in *On Beauty*, a rewriting of *Howards End* which explicitly pays "*hommage*" to E.M. Forster, an author to whom "all [her] fiction is indebted," as Smith states in the Acknowledgements section of her novel. My aim in this paper is to assess the workings of Smith's homage to her admired English literary predecessor, which is more complex and layered than has been remarked by the critics who have engaged in analyses of the novel.

Theories of intertextuality provide a framework from which to analyse *On Beauty*, since homage is an undertheorised concept subsumed into debates on literary relations. Obviously, being the writer that she is and given the author that she has chosen, Smith's association with Forster does not fit into the "writing back" model of postcolonial intertextuality described by Bill Ashcroft and his co-editors in *The Empire Writes Back*. Neither does it denote anxiety of influence in a negative Bloomian sense, for Smith proudly acknowledges her indebtedness to her ancestor, who, to borrow Eliot's words, "asserts" his "immortality" and that of the tradition that he represents through her work (14). It is more adequate to see *On Beauty* as part of the current widespread practice of overtly rewriting a prior text.¹ Smith's gesture is not very different from Will Self's in *Dorian: an Imitation* (2002), a tribute to Oscar Wilde, and it is worth mentioning here that both authors have written the introductions to a new Bloomsbury edition of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel. Far from condemning this trend, in the last two decades literary critics have underlined literature's ability to replenish itself and revitalize literary tradition through retellings. As David Cowart argues in *Literary Symbiosis*, "Classics ... benefit simply by being brought once again before the consciousness of readers, and classics must be reinterpreted for every age" (10). Smith seems to be addressing the complaints of some reviewers of the 1992 Merchant Ivory adaptation of *Howards End*, who took the film to task for remaining faithful to the novel and thus failing to be relevant to late twentieth century viewers (Billson, Canby). Her reworking of Forster is, in Cowart's terminology, symbiotic, for it "involv[es] some tangible measure of formal or thematic evolution" (26). As I will explain in the course of this paper, Smith updates Forster's themes and blends the *Howards End* material with the generic conventions of the campus novel. Furthermore, in the same way that those texts which write back to the canon are not "simply adversarial –or, at the opposite extreme, complicitous," as John Thieme argues (2)– those texts which engage in acts of homage inevitably provide some critical commentary on their predecessors. It is true, however, that homages are "unmotivated" kinds of revisions insofar as they are not meant to contest the ideology of a prior text, but imply more "unity and resemblance than critique and difference" (Gates xxvi-xxvii). Smith's reconfiguration of *Howards End* is fundamentally complicitous, but, on another level, I will try to show that she is not totally uncritical about her admired precursor.

In order to gain a sense of Smith's attraction towards Forster and of her choice of *Howards End* as an intertext, we must briefly refer to Forster's contribution to the development of the English novel and to the impact of this work. An Edwardian, Forster is not a modernist in the strict sense, but rather a central figure in the transition from Victorianism into Modernism. His style, as Daniel

1. For a superb and systematic examination of the issue of rewriting and its pervasiveness see Moraru 2001.

Schwarz has argued, has more in common with Jane Austen and Henry Fielding than with the experiments of Joyce and Lawrence (136). Yet he both appropriates and subverts the novel of manners, serving as an echo tunnel for his predecessors, but at the same time challenging the conventional morals on which English life and fiction rested. It is Forster's straddling of the old and the new, the way he transformed the English novel of manners, that most appeals to Smith. As she explains in her essay "Love, actually," despite the heavy bearing of Austen on Forster's fiction, "His protagonists are not good readers or successful moral agents, but chaotic, irrational human beings. ... He expanded the comic novel's ethical space, while unbalancing its moral certainties, simply by letting more of life in" ("Love" online). "Life" is here analogous with instinct, passion, and empathy. Smith praises the characteristic Forsterian emphasis on the importance of human connection, something that Forster found lacking in Austen, where the only appropriate connection was "the bond of marriage" ("Love"). It is not difficult to understand why Forster's tolerant personal creed and his penchant for the idea of connection should be congenial with the author of *White Teeth*. The theme of connection across cultures, classes and ideologies runs through all of Forster's novels. It is Italy versus England in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, India versus England in *A Passage to India*, England versus Germany, and the life of contemplation versus the life of action in *Howards End*, or the aestheticism of Rickie Elliot versus the earthiness of his half-brother Stephen in *The Longest Journey*. Despite the recurrence of this theme in Forster's fiction, it is in *Howards End* that it emerges as a motto, which may account for Smith's choice of this novel within the Forster canon. In fact, even though *A Passage to India* towers up as the most translated and thus widely-known work in Forster's oeuvre (Gardner 6), it is *Howards End* that consolidated Forster's reputation as a writer and gave it "clearer definition than before," to the extent that the term Forsterian was first deployed in association with his third novel (14). The novel's famous motto "Only connect!" calls for the reconciliation of three sets of characters, the liberal Schlegel sisters, their opposites, the entrepreneurial Wilcoxes and the lower middle-class represented by the Basts. Since its publication, critics have stressed the Schlegel/Wilcox dualism. The *Times Literary Supplement* contemporary review approached the novel as dealing with "the everlasting opposition of the two types which between them hold civilised life together ... those who deal in realities without understanding them ... those who understand realities without dealing in them" (Gardner 125), which in Forster's time amounted to the integration of two elites, the sensitive and intellectual Bloomsbury group and the governing and commercial English class. Subsequent criticism (Cox, Born) has highlighted, following Lionel Trilling's 1943 influential book on Forster, the author's challenge to liberal humanism through the Schlegel/Wilcox dichotomy, defined as "that loose body of middle-class opinion which includes such ideas as progress, collectivism and humanitarianism" (7). Trilling's critical appraisal stems from Forster's own liberal guilt, expressed in his essay "The Challenge of

Our Time,” where he reflects on his privileged status as a member of “the fag-end of Victorian liberalism” saying “In came the fat dividends, up rose the lofty thoughts, and we did not realize that all the time we were exploiting the poor of our country and the backward races abroad” (“Challenge” 65). This view is famously voiced by Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End*: “More and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it” (149). Indeed, the dualism at the heart of *Howards End* has an allegorical, “fable”-like (Stone 266) appeal that transcends the novel’s original Edwardian context.

Smith transposes Forster’s London liberal drawing rooms to the ivory towers of an American humanities campus. Before launching a more detailed discussion of her use of *Howards End*, by way of summary it will be useful to know that her quarrelling parties are the Belseys and the Kippses, their heads two rival Rembrandt scholars. Howard Belsey is a non-tenured professor in his fifties in a fictional Boston college called Wellington, an English man of working-class origins married to an African-American woman, Kiki. Monty Kipps is a successful Trinidadian scholar based in London and married to a spiritual and submissive wife, Carlene, who has her counterpart in Ruth Wilcox. Conflict ensues when one of the Belsey children, Jerome, meets the Kippses in London, is impressed by their vitality and enterprising spirit and has an affair mistaken for marriage intentions with the Kippses’ daughter, just like Helen Schlegel in *Howards End*. Tension builds up when Howard’s rival comes to Wellington as a visiting professor. *On Beauty* is a long novel with a crowded cast of characters, very much like *White Teeth*. Yet, as the summary above shows, Smith borrows major narrative events or kernels from *Howards End* which form a skeleton that she fills in by adding new characters and incidents. Of the three sections the novel comprises, only Section I “Kipps and Belsey,” the shortest, follows *Howards End* very closely. Parallel scenes include the letter exchanges, here emails, and the ensuing marriage misunderstanding, or the concert where the Belseys meet Leonard Bast’s counterpart in the novel. Although Smith avoids extensive textual parallels, the novel is scattered with a number of passages lifted almost verbatim from the model. In the next two sections, the Forster material fuses with the campus novel to create an autonomous work. These sections follow the contours of the academic year at Wellington, covering the Fall and Spring semesters respectively, and include stock elements of the genre such as lectures, academic discussions, department meetings, or faculty parties.

As I anticipated above, *On Beauty* pays homage to Forster’s personal creed of “tolerance, good temper and sympathy,” values which he considered pivotal in a world “rent by religious and racial persecution” (“What I Believe” 75). Besides, the title of her novel honours Forster’s aesthetic sensibility and evokes the love for the humanities that he nurtured during his Cambridge years as a member of the Apostle Society and through his association with the Bloomsbury Group. At the same time, since homages are not slavish imitations but autonomous aesthetic products, Smith updates Forster’s themes and intensifies and darkens

his vision in *Howards End* because, as one of her characters playfully asserts early in the novel, “this isn’t 1910” (*Beauty* 15). Where Forster highlights the issues of women’s suffrage, socialism and class struggle through the liberal Schlegel talk (*Howards* 20), Smith underscores the interface of race and class, as well as global problems. Not accidentally, the Leonard Bast figure seeking beauty in her novel is an underprivileged African-American, although this role is also fulfilled by an array of non-white characters living at the edges of the college affluence and who are befriended by the mixed-race Belseys, who have the Chalfens as their forerunners in *White Teeth*. These lowly characters include Carl, the African-American rapper they meet at the concert early in the novel, and who gets a job in the music archives of the Humanities Faculty; Chantelle, another African-American who attends classes without being registered as part of an affirmative action scheme; and a number of illegal Haitian immigrants who had fled the turmoil of their island in the aftermath of Aristide’s overthrow, like Monique, the Belseys’ housemaid, and Choo, Levi’s friend and a waiter at the college. Just as Leonard Bast stirs the liberal humanitarianism of the Schlegels as well as their guilt over their affluence and carefree aestheticism, the Belseys, especially Kiki and her son Levi, try to atone for their privileged status within the black American community through their interactions with the Haitians and underprivileged African-Americans. Kiki is beginning to realize that her marriage to a white man has detached her from her own people and placed her in a “sea of white” (*Beauty* 206) where she feels increasingly uneasy. The philanthropy of the Belseys is further stressed by their stand on affirmative action, which is a quintessentially liberal policy grounded in the civil rights activism of the 1960s (Capaldi). Affirmative action is one of the sources of disagreement between the Belseys and the Kippses. Monty claims that affirmative action is discrimination in reverse, since university admissions should be based on merit alone (329). For the Belseys, who accuse Monty of self-hatred, and for the Humanities faculty, it is simply “a matter of redressing the balance” (368). If, as Alfred Kazin said, “the savage reality of society had escaped” Forster’s novel (42), Smith lets more reality into hers. Whereas in Smith’s fictional campus affirmative action is not only implemented but unofficially extended to non-registered students such as Chantelle or Carl, in *Howards End* the Schlegel sisters turn the issue of Leonard Bast’s entitlement to culture into a role game played in their evening discussion club about whether an inheritance should stay in the family or be used to create local art galleries (*Howards* 107). The British Empire is the obscure source of the Wilcox fortune for Forster’s philanthropists, and Margaret’s visit to the offices of the West African Rubber Company owned by Henry does not dispel the “formlessness and vagueness” that she associates with the continent (167). In contrast, Smith emphasizes the plight of Haitians like Monique, who after fleeing their country’s humanitarian crisis, have become cheap labour in the USA.

Clearly, race is not a central concern for Forster in *Howards End*. Yet he should be credited for not making his protagonists “English to the backbone” either, as the

narrator informs us when reporting over the “origins” of the Schlegels (*Howards* 24). Through this German-English family, Forster touches upon the “complex and interconnected past” of Britain which, according to Yasmin Alibhai, has been forgotten in the debate over multiculturalism, and which rests on the erroneous assumption that Britain was a homogenous nation before the postwar colonial migration, since diversity was associated with race alone (16). This facet of the novel is seldom discussed² and neither are Forster’s own pronouncements on race and cultural nationalism. The fact that the Schlegel counterparts in *On Beauty* are mixed-race “reveals” something about its antecedent that had been missed, attesting to the symbiotic relation between both texts (Coward 8). English-born to a German father and an English mother, the Schlegel sisters never seem to ponder on their hybrid origins, but other characters do show biases against their difference, in contrast with the narrator, who seems to find value in their mixed ancestry. While Aunt Juley considers her nieces as genuinely English and the German side of the family regrets that they will never be truly German, Charles Wilcox despises Margaret as a “German cosmopolitan” (*Howards* 88). When the Schlegels and their German relatives sit together at the Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony concert at the Queen’s Hall, the narrator relishes the view, exclaiming “How interesting that row of people was! What diverse influences had gone to their making” (28). It is worth noting that in a 1939 essay titled “Racial Exercise,” propelled by the rise of racially-based social policies in Europe and in the same vein as his “Three Anti-Nazi Broadcasts,” Forster undermines the notion of racial purity with statements like “Europe is mongrel forever” (“Racial” 30). He uses his own family tree as a case study to prove that race is a “shadowy” and meaningless concept, for none of us has total control over our ancestry (30). While one side of the tree allows him to claim that he comes from an old English family, another branch proves untraceable and may have not been white (29). On a political level, Forster engages with the difficulty in the Anglo-German connection at a time when Britain and Germany were growing apart due to naval and colonial rivalries and England’s *entente* alliances with France and Russia (Mowat). What led Ernst Schlegel to England was his disidentification with his country’s superpower ambitions after taking part in several patriotic enterprises (*Howards* 24). The Schlegels’ father represents a German type found at this time, whose pro-Englishness entailed being “progressive, free-trade, internationalist and pacifist” as opposed to being “protectionist, nationalistic and in favour of vigorous and unilateral German expansionism” (Fletcher 210). Despite Ernst Schlegel’s conciliatory stance, the Anglo-German animosity existing before the First World War is dramatized through the interactions between Aunt Juley, the Schlegels and their German relatives in the early chapters of the novel. *On Beauty* not only reinterprets *Howards End* for early twenty-first century readers, but also

2. Stephan Karschay briefly refers to the Schlegel sisters’ biculturality as the source of their broadmindedness, a quality the Wilcoxes lack (205).

invites us to re-read its source text, and throws light on aspects of the novel which had been neglected, namely Forster's engagement with the diversity of the English population and with Anglo-German relations before the war.

Smith's recourse to the genre of academic fiction in *On Beauty* signals her strongest formal departure from *Howards End*, granting her novel a degree of formal development or aesthetic autonomy from its model. Interestingly, however, the academic side of the text is rich in Forsterian associations as well. An important role that Smith assigns to universities is highlighted in the title of her novel and made explicit in the epigraph to "The Anatomy Lesson" Section, taken from Elaine Scarry's 1999 Lecture *On Beauty and Being Just*, which reads "To misstate, or even merely understate, the relation of the universities to beauty is one kind of error that can be made. A university is among the precious things that can be destroyed." In her lecture, Scarry complains that although the humanities "are made up of beautiful poems, stories, paintings, sketches, sculpture, film, essays, debates," we seldom speak of their beauty (58). By beauty we may understand the integrity or "internal harmony" that artistic objects possess, as Forster states in his essay "Art for Art's Sake" (99). Forster's own connections with the university, illustrated in his own life and works, are relevant here. His undergraduate years at Cambridge (1897-1901) exerted a strong influence on the development of his ethic and aesthetic ideas, since it was there that he met the leading figures of the Bloomsbury circle, also members of the Cambridge Conversazione Society, known as the Apostles (Sidorsky 245-6). His was "the Cambridge of G.E. Moore," as he states in his introduction to *The Longest Journey* (lxviii), which he dedicated to his university friends, "Fratribus." Forster's experiences at Cambridge resonate in *The Longest Journey* as well as in *Maurice*, where characters devote their university years to the study of the humanities and to discussions of metaphysics, ethics, poetry and art. Although the university portrayed in Forster's novels belonged to a male middle-class elite from which a Leonard Bast, a John Fowley or Thomas Hardy's self-taught scholar in *Jude the Obscure* or Virginia Woolf herself was banned, or where "the dons ... felt it right to spoil a love affair [Maurice and Clive's] when they could" (*Maurice* 68), he was able to witness the transformation of English universities into more egalitarian institutions. In his 1940 essay "Does Culture Matter?," Forster states that whereas culture no longer serves "as a barrier against the mob or as a ladder into the aristocracy" in England, people have now become indifferent to it (111-2). Therefore, he urges educators to shun dogmatism and convey joy and enthusiasm when they teach "'the Classics' –Sophocles, Velazquez, Henry James" instead of presenting them as something "dolorous and astringent", if they wish to stir their disciples' interest (113). Forster does not portray the Academe in *Howards End*, but it is worth noting that Ernst Schlegel, who worked at an English university for some time, is critical of how German universities focus on collecting facts and fail to "rekindle the life within" (*Howards* 25). Smith's depiction of the University in *On Beauty* is bleak. Her Humanities professors are the standard fare in academic novels, which satirize the manners of the scholars

working in the Humanities and which, according to Elaine Showalter in *Faculty Towers*, have grown bitter since the 1970s (146). The academics in these novels are more interested in campus politics, power, and sexual intrigue than in university service. The two scholars at the centre of *On Beauty* have conflicting approaches to their discipline in keeping with their ideological differences. Neither Howard's dolorous and astringent stand on Rembrandt, to quote Forster, nor Monty's more conventional take on the artist do justice to his art, since both approaches fail to respond to its beauty genuinely. Enmeshed in their cultural wars, these academics jeopardize their academic mission. Monty's art criticism serves the market forces and his own finances. In contrast, Howard's deconstructionist drive leads him to dismantle the very word "painting" (*Beauty* 253) preventing him, already in his mid-fifties, from producing the piece of research that will grant him tenure, or from meeting his students' expectations. Smith stresses the disappointment of Katherine Armstrong, a first-year scholarship student who has chosen Howard's course out of sheer interest and love for the painter, only to find a teacher intent on denying his genius and unresponsive to the beauty and meaning of his work. While Katie sees Rembrandt's *Seated Nude* as a very accurate and unbiased representation of an aging woman: "This is what a woman is: unadorned, after children and work and age, and experience – *these are the marks of living* ... all these intimations of mortality from an inkpot!" Howard approaches the painting analytically as "gendered, class debasement" (251-252). Smith draws a sharp contrast between these men's and their wives' responses to art. Kiki Belsey, who complains that representationalist art is banned in her house, becomes infatuated with a Haitian painting depicting a Voodoo goddess owned by Carlene Kipps, for whom paintings are her "company" and "joy" (175). The Haitian painting becomes the object of the contested inheritance in the novel, where art instead of a pastoral abode functions as the repository of values. What threatens the academic mission of the university in *On Beauty* is not the current trend towards for-profit education, but rather the Humanities faculty's lack of academic values and aesthetic sensibility.³

Curiously enough, Smith pays tribute to Forster and to the literary system in which he belongs by establishing intertextual links with other academic novels which in turn also bear the influence of *Howards End*. *On Beauty* has clear, though unacknowledged, connections with other academic satires such as David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988) and Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975), which seem to have passed unnoticed by critics. This may partly be due to the tendency to view literary influence as "unitary" and "linear," when in fact it can be "layered," involving a number of possible intertexts (Thieme 70). The reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* mentions that in its "lightness" the novel

3. For an analysis of Smith's aesthetic concerns in *On Beauty* see Fiona Tolan, who considers that despite the similarities between *On Beauty* and *White Teeth*, aesthetic issues dominate the former (128).

“resembles the best campus novels produced in the 1980s –those of David Lodge and Alison Lurie” (Ratcliffe 10), and another critic also connects *On Beauty* with the campus novel and more specifically with *Changing Places* (Lanone 189), but neither relate this genre to the tradition of the English novel or dwell on the implications of Smith’s inscription of her work within this tradition.⁴ *Nice Work* and *The History Man* operate as intertexts of *On Beauty* in different ways. Smith is likely to have taken her cue for relocating the Schlegel-Wilcox conflict to the academic arena from *Nice Work*, a novel with a rich intertextual texture of its own that includes Charlotte Brönte’s *Shirley* or Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* as well as *Howards End*. In his Preface to the Penguin edition of *Howards End*, Lodge underlines the appeal of this novel to Humanities professors and students (vii). *Nice Work* depicts the hilarious interactions between English lecturer Robyn Penrose and Vic Wilcox, the managing director of an engineering factory, brought about by a so-called Industry Year scheme through which the university is expected to become more responsive to market forces. Robyn, a staunch deconstructionist who believes that “universities are the cathedrals of the modern age” (*Nice* 241), echoes Margaret Schlegel’s liberal guilt when she wonders “But who pays?” (218). In this novel, Lodge takes issue with the economic system that inflicts cuts on universities as well as with academics like Robyn Penrose who dogmatically impose poststructuralist theory on their undergraduate students. Howard Belsey is modelled on scholars like Robyn Penrose and, more specifically, Howard Kirk, the radical sociology professor in Bradbury’s *The History Man*. For all his liberalism, Howard Kirk imposes his Marxist and Freudian view of sociology –“poverty, racialism, inequality, sexism, imperialism, and repression” (*History* 147)– on his students, giving unfair marks to those who, like George Carmody, hold different opinions and lead different lifestyles from his own. Despite his attempts to be marked fairly, Carmody fails Sociology and eventually leaves college without a degree. In a faculty meeting scene which reverberates in *On Beauty*, a heated argument ensues over whether a renown geneticist called Mangel, a likely model for Monty Kipps, should be invited to lecture. Howard Kirk objects to his visit on the grounds that Mangel is a racist and a fascist, but he is made to face the fact that a liberal campus should promote “free enquiry” (169). It is on this same basis that Howard Belsey’s proposal to censor Monty’s lectures is dismissed in a parallel scene in *On Beauty* (331), although the morality of Bradbury’s character is much more dubious than that of Smith’s. By echoing the works of Bradbury and Lodge within her retelling of Forster, Smith is reinforcing

4. Catherine Lanone states that “Smith’s humorous satire of academic life belongs to a tradition of campus novels, from Nabokov’s *Pnin* ... to David Lodge’s *Changing Places*” (189). She goes on to establish some general parallelisms between the latter and *On Beauty*, namely the swapping of places between academics, the power games, the inconsistencies between ideals and academic performance and the extramarital affairs found in both novels. Sophie Ratcliffe does not elaborate on her David Lodge and Alison Lurie connection.

her inscription in and homage to the English social comedy, since Bradbury and Lodge are heirs of an English “seriocomic” tradition that goes back to the novels of Fielding, Sterne and Dickens, and the more recent works of Amis, Greene or Waugh (Morace 3-4). As Bradbury himself has argued (*Possibilities* 31-32), the comic mode is at the core of the English novel form which has combined realism and the comic spirit since its beginnings.

As I have tried to demonstrate, there is more complicity and resemblance between *On Beauty* and *Howards End* than critique and difference. Still, for all her admiration of Forster, Smith has criticised “his Pantheism, his fetish for the exotic” or the “mawkish execution” of his ideas of human connection (“Love”), although she does not elaborate much on these views. Some of these critical comments of Forster are illustrated in her novel. Where *Howards End* is pervaded with mystical descriptions of an English landscape threatened by the encroachment of the modern city, the wych-elm being a powerful symbol in the novel, *On Beauty* privileges the urban over nature. During his Christmas visit to London, Howard becomes a *flâneur* in the streets of the now multicultural Cricklewood, the working-class neighbourhood where he was raised, and revels in the palimpsestic character of the city. After almost a century of urban sprawl, Kensal Green, one of the few remaining Victorian country graveyards, now “greet[s] the city on all sides” (302). There is not a hint of nostalgia in the urban descriptions found in the London part of the novel, which resemble the cityscapes of *White Teeth*. Regarding Smith’s concern about Forster’s mawkishness, one of the most recurring critiques levelled against *Howards End* has in fact been its “fairy tale” resolution where opposites are happily reconciled (Kazin 42). It is true that a more sophisticated reading of the novel’s ending should acknowledge the tragic events that precede it, such as the alleged murder of Leonard Bast and the imprisonment of Charles Wilcox but, on the whole, the possibility of connection is eventually realized with the tree families living happily together under the same pastoral roof. As Leslie White observes, if Forster did not believe that connection was possible, at least at the time *Howards End* was conceived, the novel would become “a mean-spirited trick” (57). Smith provides an open and less strained denouement, in keeping with the darker tone of her novel and with her lack of concern for closure.

In *Aspects of the Novel* Forster expressed his preoccupation with endings, saying that novelists would find it difficult to finish their stories “if it were not for death and marriage” (94). Contrarily, *On Beauty* ends rather inconclusively with a pending divorce and an inheritance lawsuit. The rift between Howard and Kipps is unbridgeable, the author making no attempt to reconcile these characters. Carl Thomas also fails to connect with the academic middle class and disappears from Wellington and the novel. Monty turns out to be an exploiter of his own people, taking advantage of the poverty of Haitian artists and underprivileged black female students. In another shift from *Howards End*, Kipps is taken to

court by Kiki who claims the painting Carlene had willed to her after finding her letter by chance. The lawsuit is not dramatised, although we learn that Kiki does not see herself as a spiritual heir to her friend's possession but intends to sell it and donate the money to the Haitian Support Group. The future of the Belsey marriage and Howard's career is uncertain. The novel culminates in a conference which Howard has agreed to give in order to improve his status within the faculty. Academically speaking, the lecture goes terribly wrong because he has forgotten his notes and remains speechless before the slides. Yet Smith suggests that this speechlessness is positive. For the first time, Howard proves able to forsake theory and see the life of the painting, "the ever present human hint of yellow" (443), as well as his life in the painting, since he identifies the portrait of Rembrandt's wife with his own wife who smiles from the audience. Smith's ending hints at some degree of wish-fulfilment, but provides none.

As I hope to have shown in the course of this paper, the association of *Howards End* and *On Beauty* is highly symbiotic. Smith uses Forster's classic as a launch pad to create an autonomous aesthetic work in which his themes are brought up to date and his materials reconfigured through the conventions of the campus novel. The benefit for *Howards End* is two-fold. Forster's classic is not only revitalized for early twenty-first century readers, but Smith also casts light on aspects of this novel and its author which had been overlooked, such as his concern with cultural hybridity or the university. Surprisingly, *On Beauty* boasts other intertexts besides *Howards End*, having oblique connections with academic novels by Lodge and Bradbury. In drawing on Forster and other authors of social comedies, Smith places her text in a line of descent that runs from the seriocomic origins of the English novel. Her homage is more comprehensive than it may seem, for it includes not only Forster's classic and the author's ethic and aesthetic views, but extends to the whole system to which he belongs and in which Smith inscribes herself. I have also argued that homages are seldom blind or slavish, and there is also room in *On Beauty* for Smith to take to task Forster's pastoral nostalgia, the lack of real social commitment in his novel, or the strained character of some of his connections, which results in a less optimistic novelistic outlook than that of Forster in *Howards End*.

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