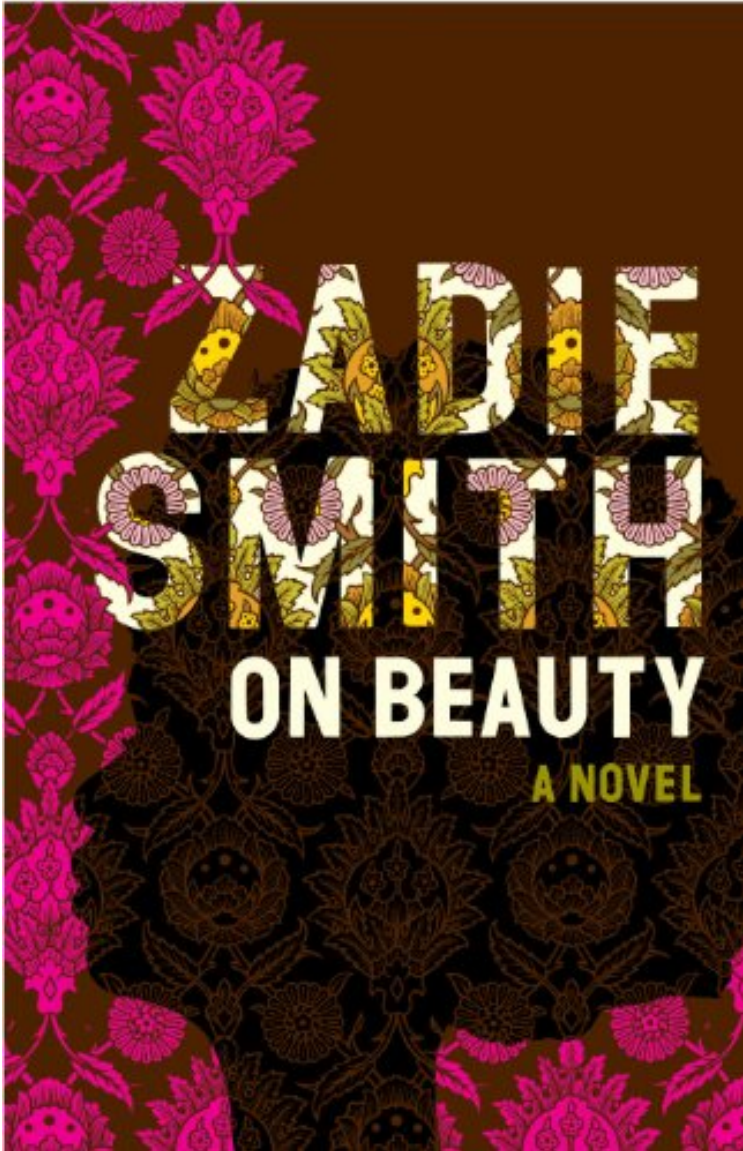


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On Beauty



Par Zadie Smith
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurZadie Smith's *On Beauty* is a funny, powerful and moving story about love and family Why do we fall in love with the people we do? Why do we visit our mistakes on our children? What makes life truly beautiful?Set in New England mainly and London partly, *On Beauty* concerns a pair of feuding families - the Belseys and the Kipps - and a clutch of doomed affairs. It puts low morals among high ideals and asks some searching questions about what life does to love. For the Belseys and the Kipps, the confusions - both personal and political - of our uncertain age are about to be brought close to home: right to the heart of family.'The novel I didn't want to finish, I was enjoying it so much' John Sutherland, *Evening Standard*'Thrums with intellectual sass and know-how' *Literary* 'Delightfully entertaining . . . filled with

humour, generosity and contemporary sparkle' Alex Clark, Daily Telegraph 'My novel of the year . . . Delicious' Liz Jones, Evening Standard 'Satirical, wise and sexy' Washington Post 'Heartstopping' The Times Literary Supplement 'A triumph, Smith's comedy shines' Daily Mail 'Ambitious, hugely impressive, beautifully observed' Guardian

Zadie Smith was born in north-west London in 1975. Her debut novel, *White Teeth*, won the Whitbread First Novel Award, the Guardian First Book Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction, and the Commonwealth Writers' First Book Prize, and was included in TIME 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005. Her second novel, *On Beauty*, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and won the Orange Prize for Fiction. She has written two further novels, *The Autograph Man* and *NW*, a collection of essays, *Changing My Mind*, and also edited a short-story anthology, *The Book of Other People*.

In an author's note at the end of *On Beauty*, Zadie Smith writes: "My largest structural debt should be obvious to any E.M. Forster fan; suffice it to say he gave me a classy old frame, which I covered with new material as best I could." If it is true that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Forster, perched on a cloud somewhere, should be all puffed up with pride. His disciple has taken *Howards End*, that marvelous tale of class difference, and upped the ante by adding race, politics, and gender. The end result is a story for the 21st century, told with a perfect ear for everything: gangsta street talk; academic posturing, both British and American; down-home black Floridian straight talk; and sassy, profane kids, both black and white. Howard Belsey is a middle-class white liberal Englishman teaching abroad at Wellington, a thinly disguised version of one of the Ivies. He is a Rembrandt scholar who can't finish his book and a recent adulterer whose marriage is now on the slippery slope to disaster. His wife, Kiki, a black Floridian, is a warm, generous, competent wife, mother, and medical worker. Their children are Jerome, disgusted by his father's behavior, Zora, Wellington sophomore firebrand feminist and Levi, eager to be taken for a "homey," complete with baggy pants, hoodies and the ever-present iPod. This family has no secrets--at least not for long. They talk about everything, appropriate to the occasion or not. And, there is plenty to talk about. The other half of the story is that of the Kipps family: Monty, stiff, wealthy ultra-conservative vocal Christian and Rembrandt scholar, whose book has been published. His wife Carlene is always slightly out of focus, and that's the way she wants it. She wafts over all proceedings, never really connecting with anyone. That seems to be endemic in the Kipps household. Son Michael is a bit of a Monty clone and daughter Victoria is not at all what Daddy thinks she is. Indeed, Forster's advice, "Only connect," is lost on this group. The two academics have long been rivals, detesting each other's politics and disagreeing about Rembrandt. They are thrown into further conflict when Jerome leaves Wellington to get away from the discovery of his father's affair, lands on the Kipps' doorstep, falls for Victoria and mistakes what he has going with her for love. Howard makes it worse by trying to fix it. Then, Kipps is granted a visiting professorship at Wellington and the whole family arrives in Massachusetts. From this raw material, Smith has fashioned a superb book, her best to date. She has interwoven class, race, and gender and taken everyone prisoner. Her even-handed renditions of liberal and/or conservative mouthings are insightful, often hilarious, and damning to all. She has a great time exposing everyone's clay feet. This author is a young woman cynical beyond her years, and we are all richer for it.

--Valerie Ryan

Extrait

One may as well begin with Jerome's e-mails to his father:

To: HowardBelsey@fas.Wellington.edu
From: Jeromeabroad@easymail.com
Date: Nov 5th
Subject: (none)

Hey Dad basically I'm just going to keep on keeping on with these mails I'm no longer expecting you to reply but I am still hoping you will, if that makes sense. Well, I'm really enjoying everything. I work in Monty Kipps' own office (did you know that he's actually Lord Monty??), which is in the Green Park area. It's me and a Cornish girl called Emily. She's cool. There's also three more yank interns downstairs (one from Boston!), so I feel pretty much at home. I'm a kind of an intern with the duties of a PA organizing lunches, filing, talking to people on the phone, that kind of thing. Monty's work is much more than just the academic stuff he's involved with the Race Commission and he has church charities in Barbados, Jamaica, Haiti etche keeps me pretty busy. Because it's such a small set-up, I get to work closely with him and of course I'm living with the family now, so it's like being completely integrated into something new. Ah, the family. You didn't respond so I'm imagining your reaction (not too hard to imagine...) the truth is it was really just the most convenient option at the time. And they were totally kind to offer I was being evicted from the 'bedsit' place in Marylebone and the Kipps aren't under any obligation to me, but they asked and I accepted gratefully. I've been in their place a week now, and still no mention of any rent, which should tell you something. I know you want me to tell you it's a nightmare but I can't I love living here. It's a different universe. The house is just wow -- early Victorian, a 'terrace' unassuming looking outside but massive inside -- but there's still a kind of humility that really appeals to me almost everything white, and a lot of hand--made things, and quilts

and dark wood shelves and cornices and in the whole place there's only one television, which is in the basement anyway just so Monty can keep abreast of news stuff, and some of the stuff he does on the television but that's it. I think of it as the negativized image of our house sometimes... It's in this bit of North London 'Kilburn' which sounds bucolic but boy oh boy is not bucolic in the least, except for this street we live on off the 'high road' and it's suddenly like you can't hear a thing and you can just sit in the yard in the shadow of this huge tree 80 feet tall and ivy-ed all up the trunk... reading and feeling like you're in a novel...

Autumn's different here Fall much less intense and trees balder earlier everything more melancholy somehow. The family are another thing again they deserve more space and time than I have right now (I'm writing this on my lunch hour). But in brief: one boy: Michael, nice, sporty. A little dull, I guess. You'd think he was anyway. He's a business guy exactly what business I haven't been able to figure out. And he's huge! He's got two inches on you, at least. They're all big in that athletic, Caribbean way. He must be 6' 5". There's also a very tall and beautiful daughter, Victoria who I've seen only in photos (she's inter-railing in Europe), but she's coming back for a while on Friday, I think. Monty's wife, Carlene Kipps -- perfect. She's not from Trinidad, though It's a small island, St something but I'm not sure. I didn't properly hear it the first time she mentioned it and now it's like it's too late to ask. She's always trying to fatten me up she feeds me constantly. The rest of the family talk about sports and God and politics and Carlene floats above it all like a kind of angel -- and she's helping me with prayer. She really knows how to pray and it's very cool to be able to pray without someone in your family coming into the room and a) passing wind b) shouting c) analyzing the 'phoney metaphysics' of prayer d) singing loudly e) laughing. So that's Carlene Kipps. Tell Mom that she bakes. Just tell her that and then walk away chuckling... Now, listen to this next bit carefully: in the morning THE WHOLE KIPPS FAMILY have breakfast together and a conversation TOGETHER and then get into a car TOGETHER (are you taking notes?) I know, I know not easy to get your head around. I never met a family who wanted to spend so much time with each other. I hope you can see from everything I've written that your feud or whatever it is is really a waste of time. It's all on your side anyway Monty doesn't do feuds. You've never even really met properly just a lot of public debates and stupid letters. It's such a waste of energy. Most of the cruelty in the world is just misplaced energy. I've got to go work calls! Love to Mom and Levi, partial love to Zora, And remember: I love you dad (and I pray for you, too) phew! longest mail ever! Jerome XXOXXXX