

Parallels between *On Beauty* and *Howard's End*

<i>On Beauty</i>	<i>Howards End</i>
Opening sentence: 'One may as well begin with Jerome's e-mails to his father'.	Opening sentence: 'One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister'.
Brief and ill fated romance between Jerome Belsey and Victoria Kipps. The families represent different ideological worlds – one liberal the other conservative.	Brief and ill fated romance between Helen Schlegel and Paul Wilcox. The families represent different cultural and spiritual values. The Schlegel's believe in art and literature and are aware of their 'old money' privilege. The Wilcoxes are 'new' industrial money with no great feeling for the spiritual and certainly no profound recognition of their own privilege and the responsibility it places on them towards the less fortunate (noblesse d'oblige).
Jerome feels liberated by the Kipps' as a family and it frees him to pursue his own Christianity.	Helen is fascinated by the different energy of the Wilcoxes. 'The truth was that she had fallen in love, not with an individual but with a family...The energy of the Wilcoxes had fascinated her, had created new images of beauty in her responsive mind. To be all day with them in the open air, to sleep at night under their roof, had seemed the supreme joy of life, and had led to that abandonment of personality that is a possible prelude to love. She had <i>liked</i> giving in to Mr Wilcox, or Evie, or Charles; she had <i>liked</i> being told that her notions of life were sheltered or academic; that Equality was nonsense, Votes for Women nonsense, Socialism nonsense, Art and Literature, except for when conducive to strengthening the character, nonsense. One by one the Schlegel fetishes had been overthrown, and, though professing to defend them, she had rejoiced'. (ch. iv)
Jerome mistakes Victoria's intention when she has sex with him and the 'engagement' is dissolved when it becomes clear that she has no intention of marrying him.	Helen breaks off her engagement when she fears that at the centre of the Wilcox's world there is only 'panic and emptiness' and no real feeling.
The Belseys attend a performance of Mozart's Requiem (ch. 7).	The Schlegel's attend a performance of Beethoven's Fifth

Parallels between *On Beauty* and *Howard's End*

<i>On Beauty</i>	<i>Howards End</i>
<p>An unnamed narrator interprets the music. 'The closer you get to the pit, the more you begin to have the sense that what awaits you there will be terrifying. Yet you experience this terror as a kind of blessing, a gift. Your long walk would have had no meaning were it not for this pit at the end of it...'</p>	<p>Symphony (ch. v). Helen interprets the music, visualising the notes as goblins. 'They were not aggressive creatures; it was that that made them so terrible to Helen. They merely observed in passing that there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in the world'.</p>
<p>Zora accidentally picks up the wrong Discman at the concert – that belonging to Carl.</p>	<p>Helen accidentally picks up the wrong umbrella at the concert – that belonging to Leonard Bass.</p>
<p>On Carl: 'I'm not an <i>educated</i> brother...I guess you could say I hit my own books in my own way...I get my culture where I can, you know – going to free shit like tonight for example. Anything happening that's free in this city and might teach me something, I'm <i>there</i>'. (ch.7, p. 76) Levi, Kiki and Zora all find Carl interesting and attractive and, in their different ways, take an interest in his plight.</p>	<p>On Leonard: 'If only he could talk like this, he would have caught the world. Oh, to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well-informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started! But it would take one years. With an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women, who had been reading steadily from childhood?' (ch.v, p. 34). Leonard is on the very precipice of poverty. He works as a clerk and has barely enough to eat. The 'theft' of his umbrella makes a material difference to his life so he must visit the Schlegels at home to get it back. They take an interest in him and his plight.</p>
<p>The matriarch in the Kipps family appears materially different from the rest and although never outwardly challenging their ideology or philosophy appears fundamentally at odds with it. Carlene Kipps takes an immediate liking to Kiki Belsey, sensing a deep sympathy between them. Carlene Kipps has a terminal illness, the knowledge of which she keeps from her family.</p>	<p>The matriarch in the Wilcox family appears materially different from the rest and although never outwardly challenging their ideology or philosophy appears fundamentally at odds with it. Ruth Wilcox takes an immediate liking to Margaret Schlegel, sensing a deep sympathy between them. Ruth Wilcox has a terminal illness, the knowledge of which she keeps from her family.</p>
<p>The description of the relationship between Carlene and Kiki is perhaps the most direct 'borrowing' of language, plot and motif from Forster. 'Was Carlene Kipps one of these women who</p>	<p>'Was Mrs Wilcox one of the unsatisfactory people – there are many of them – who dangle intimacy and then withdraw it? They evoke our interests and affections, and keep the life of the spirit</p>

Parallels between *On Beauty* and *Howard's End*

<i>On Beauty</i>	<i>Howards End</i>
<p>promises friendship but never truly delivers it? A friendship flirt? Or was Kiki herself mistaken in her expectations?' (ch.11, p. 264) Carlene asks Kiki to accompany her on a shopping trip to Boston to catch up on her Christmas shopping. Carlene announces that she is putting Kiki on her shopping list.</p> <p>Carlene tells Kiki that they are going to borrow a friend's house in Amherst very close to where Emily Dickinson lived. '...the really wonderful thing is their collection. They have three Edward Hoppers, two Singer Sargents and a Miro; (p. 266). On impulse, Carlene invites Kiki to Amherst. '...let's go now. I have the keys – we could get the train and be there by lunch. I want you to see the pictures – they should be loved by somebody like you. We'll go right away when this is wrapped. We'll be back for tomorrow evening'. (pp. 268-269). Surprised by the sudden invitation, Kiki declines it. Then, regretting her decision changes her mind and meets Carlene at the station. The whole expedition is thwarted when Carlene's family show up.</p>	<p>dawdling round them. Then they withdraw. When physical passion is involved, there is a definite name for such behaviour – flirting – and if carried far enough it is punishable by law. But no law – not public opinion even – punishes those who coquette with friendship, though the dull ache that they inflict, the sense of misdirected effort and exhaustion, may be as intolerable. Was she one of these?' (ch. x, p. 67)</p> <p>Ruth asks Margaret to accompany her on a shopping trip in London to purchase Christmas presents. Ruth tells Margaret to put her name at the top of her shopping list.</p> <p>On impulse, Ruth invites Margaret to her country house – Howards End. Surprised by the sudden invitation, Margaret declines it. Then, regretting her decision changes her mind and meets Ruth at the station. The whole expedition is thwarted when Ruth's family show up.</p>
<p>Carlene owns a painting by Hyppolite. 'It's worth a great deal, I believe, but that's not why I love it. I got it in Haiti itself on my very first visit, <u>before I met my husband</u>'. (p. 175. My emphasis). Kiki connects with the painting instantly. It is of Maitresse Erzulie. 'She's a great Voodoo goddess, Erzulie. She's called the Black Virgin – also, the Violent Venus. Poor Clotilde won't look at her, can't even be in the same room as her – did you notice? A superstition... She represents love, beauty, purity, the ideal female and the moon...and she's the mystere of jealousy, vengeance and discord, <i>and</i>, on the other hand, of love, perpetual help, goodwill, health, beauty and fortune' (p. 175).</p> <p>Kiki asks if Erzulie avenges herself on men. Carlene replies ' Yes,</p>	<p>Ruth Wilcox owns a rural house called Howards End. (Howard being her maiden name. Smith inverts this by calling her central male character Howard). <u>She inherited the house before she met her husband</u>. Before her marriage the house was a basic farmhouse, but the Wilcoxes have 'improved' it with the addition of a garage etc. Ruth has a profound connection with the house, whereas all the rest of her family suffer chronic hay fever from the rural surrounds and can barely go outside once there. 'Howards End was nearly pulled down once. It would have killed me'. (ch. x, p. 71). The implication is that it was her husband's idea to pull it down, though this is never overtly stated.</p> <p>Margaret discerns that 'Mrs Wilcox, though a loving wife and mother, had only one passion in life – her house – and that the</p>

Parallels between *On Beauty* and *Howard's End*

<i>On Beauty</i>	<i>Howards End</i>
<p>I believe so'.</p>	<p>moment was solemn when she invited a friend to share this passion with her. To answer 'another day' was to answer as a fool. 'Another day' will do for bricks and mortar, but not for the Holy of Holies into which Howards End had been transfigured'. (p.73)</p> <p>When it becomes clear that Helen is going to have a child out of wedlock, Margaret barricades the two of them at Howards End, locking out her husband and a doctor. 'A new feeling came over her: she was fighting for women against men. She did not care about rights, but if men came into Howards End it should be over her body' (ch. xxxvi, p. 247)</p> <p>Ruth tells Margaret of a legend surrounding a beautiful wyc helm tree that stands at Howards End. There are pig's teeth cut into the bark. In bygone days, local people had a superstition that if they touched the bark it would cure toothache. Ruth never shares this legend with her husband, and it is Margaret who ends up telling him, though she does not mention her source (ch. xxiv, p. 176)</p>
<p>In a handwritten will, Carlene leaves the Erzulie painting to Kiki. Her family ignore the bequest and are angered and upset by it. Kiki learns of the bequest when Levi steals the painting as part of a politically motivated bid to 'redistribute' stolen wealth to the people of Haiti. Whilst levering the painting out of the bedroom Kiki finds a note behind the painting from Carlene. 'To Kiki – please enjoy this painting. It needs to be loved by someone like you. Your friend, Carlene'. (p. 430). At the close of the novel, Kiki is fighting Monty Kipps in court for ownership of the painting.</p>	<p>In a handwritten will, Ruth leaves Howards End to Margaret (p. 82). Her family is horrified and agrees to ignore the bequest. Margaret does not learn of the bequest until the very end of the novel through a careless remark of her silly step daughter. By then, she has married Paul Wilcox (Ruth's widower) and he has already legally made Howards End over to her. In her turn, Margaret bequeaths the house to Helen's illegitimate child (conceived with Leonard Bass)</p>
<p>Levi instinctively understands his mother's deep grief at the passing of Carlene Kipps, using Forster's 'only connect'</p>	<p>Perhaps E.M. Forster is most famous for the line 'only connect'. He uses several variations on it in <i>Howards End</i> but it is his</p>

Parallels between *On Beauty* and *Howard's End*

<i>On Beauty</i>	<i>Howards End</i>
<p>philosophy to explain it. ‘...sometimes it’s like you just meet someone and you just know that you’re totally connected, and that this person is, like, your brother – or your sister...Even if they don’t, like, recognize it, <i>you</i> feel it. And in a lot of ways it don’t matter if they do or they don’t see that for what it is – all you can do is put the feeling out there. That’s <i>your</i> duty. Then you just wait and see what comes back to you. That’s the deal’. (p. 304)</p>	<p>central philosophy and the epigram that opens the book. Margaret blasts Henry Wilcox when he fails to recognize the moral similarity between his infidelity to his dead wife and Helen’s extra marital tryst with Leonard Bass ‘These men are you. You can’t recognize them, because you cannot connect’. (p. 263)</p> <p>‘Christ was evasive when they questioned Him. It is those that cannot connect who hasten to cast the first stone’. (ch. xl, p. 266)</p> <p>‘...she never forgot anyone for whom she had once cared; she connected, though the connection might be bitter, and she hoped that some day Henry would do the same’. (ch. xxv, p. 177)</p>
<p>Both novels are concerned with the moral question of how the privileged should approach the poor and what can best be done to help them. The Belseys are for affirmative action and legal equality. The Kipps’ are for self reliance and personal responsibility. Carl becomes Zora’s particular project, The Haitians (particularly Choo) become Levi’s. Neither ends well. Zora’s desire to assist Carl to ‘become a ‘Wellingtonian’ is compromised by her sexual attraction and desire for him. When he rejects her, she reacts violently and Carl never returns to his job at the College. Levi implicitly believes a highly patriarchal version of Haitian history and politics that probably ends with his arrest for theft.</p> <p>Carl to Zora: ‘People like me are just toys to people like you...I’m just some experiment for you to play with. You people aren’t even black any more, man – I don’t know <i>what</i> you are’. (p. 418)</p>	<p>The Schlegels attempt to help Leonard Bass to ‘rise’. They pass on some confidential information from Henry Wilcox that the insurance firm for which he works is about to fold. Leonard finds work elsewhere but at a much reduced salary and is shortly thereafter fired. It turns out that Henry’s information was incorrect but he sees no personal culpability and refuses to give Leonard a job. Full of sympathy, Helen sleeps with Leonard and then tries to give him five thousand pounds. The money is rejected and Leonard disappears. Eventually he dies a beggar. He is found at the inquest to have heart disease but Charles Wilcox is charged with manslaughter for attacking Leonard with the flat of a sword when he learns that he was Helen’s ‘seducer’.</p> <p>‘Helen daren’t slang the rich being rich herself, but she would like to. There’s an odd notion, that I haven’t yet got hold of, running about at the back of her brain, that poverty is somehow ‘real’ “ (p. 154)</p>
<p>Howard Belsey is sexually involved with Monty Kipps’ daughter. This indiscretion ultimately compromises his job, his already</p>	<p>Henry Wilcox was sexually involved with Leonard Bass’s now wife, Jacky, some ten years earlier in Cyprus. He refuses to</p>

Parallels between *On Beauty* and *Howard's End*

<i>On Beauty</i>	<i>Howards End</i>
strained marriage and causes the confrontation between Zora and Carl that sees Carl disappear into what Forster calls the 'abyss'.	recognize any responsibility to assist Leonard nor does he recognize any betrayal to his first wife. He expels the Basts and Helen from Howards End when they come to confront him after the loss of Leonard's job; and is probably thereby indirectly responsible for their tryst at a local hotel.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

Smith acknowledges her debt to Forster in her introduction. There are knowing asides throughout the novel, e.g. Howard's name, his finding a copy of Forster's *Room with a View* when he visits his father and saying 'Can't stand Forster'. (p. 298). But is this enough? What is the line between homage and plagiarism? Has Smith crossed it?

What is the place for 'updates/reinterpretations' of classics, e.g. the films *Clueless*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*, etc. Do they introduce the classics to new audiences and ensure their survival? Or do they 'dumb them down' for audiences too lazy to do the hard work that difficult, complex themes require?

Is Smith suggesting that race is now the question that class once was?

EDITIONS USED:

E.M. Forster, *Howard's End*, Penguin Books, 2000

Zadie Smith, *On Beauty*, Penguin Books, 2006