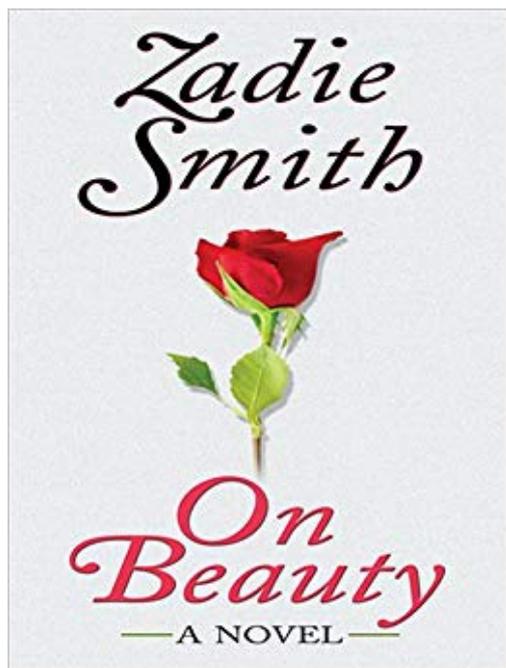


## On Beauty by Zadie Smith



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Book by Smith, Zadie



## Reviews of the *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith

Nirad

I read a dozen books of literary fiction last summer, and this is the one that sticks with me. The characters are original and memorable but also believable. Smith spins a tale I had never heard before, just surprising enough to still be realistic. At no point was I bored. Reading *On Beauty* was one of those treats where you actually wake up thinking about the story and hoping you can spend time in that world before you have to get back to yours. No serial killers here, nor detectives, just a family trying to stick together while time and human nature is pulling them apart--the way it tends to do.

Warianys

I quickly fell in love with the characters in this book. They were multifaceted, likable people, but not perfect (like real humans). The situations seemed real. I would definitely read another book about Kiki and her kids.

I think the author may be confused about what states in the U.S. are part of the Deep South (versus Southern), but that was very easy to overlook.

Neol

"On Beauty" is, in the manner of Austen or James, a character driven view of "ordinary life" made to seem extraordinary. It is both every family and a distinctly unusual family. Howard and Keiki, long married, are vividly drawn so that one can "see" how much one's choices define the lives of those around us. The dialog is authentic, the academic dialogue a triumph of irony, and the protagonist(s) a manual for how one's choices determine--as the Greeks believed--one's fate.

I recommend this book to anyone who will be sensitive to the author's blending of cross-cultural relationships, academic pretension and the vivid, consuming woman at the center of the novel. She is both fictional and real.

Awene

Such an excellent novel with very complex characters. I had tried reading White Teeth but couldn't get into it. This one really kept my attention.

Adrierdin

An odd read but one that goes interesting places. Feels especially relevant in 2017 when there is so much debate over free speech on campuses. I didn't realize that this book was a reinterpretation of another and would be interested in seeing how the two books work with and against each other.

Thetalune

As a Booker Prize finalist, this novel should be good. Unfortunately, it isn't. Almost without exception, the characters are unlikeable and shallow. Most of them live in a college town, but author Zadie Smith apparently doesn't care much for universities. She makes dueling Rembrandt scholars Monty Kipps (an unchristian Christian, grave robber, and neo-con) and Howard Belsey (an illiberal liberal, without a recent original thought, who is temperamentally unable to avoid coupling with members of his faculty and student body) into cardboard cutouts of the life of the mind. Their respective families and heavily satirized university colleagues don't fare much better.

Philosophically "On Beauty" leaves much to be desired as well. Is Mozart or Keats more beautiful than hip-hop, and if so, why? Is beauty physical, e.g., the 20-year-old temptress Victoria Kipps, or is it found rather in a breadth of humanity, e.g., the 250-pound matron and pie-giver Kiki Belsey? Does deconstructing a text or a painting reveal its beauty or kill it? Is art life? Does anyone care?

The pacing is uneven, the book has a bloated feel, the prose is often Edwardian, there are riffs (such as Howard's visit with his estranged father) that lead nowhere, characters disappear without a trace, the end is unilluminating. On the other hand, the publisher overstocked by half. The resulting price is more than right.

Dogrel

Took a while to get into this book but when I finally did I liked it. The characters are well developed although they are not all likeable.

It is difficult to write a review of this third novel of Zadie Smith without making a comparison to her bestselling, freshman attempt "White Teeth". I was captivated by "White Teeth"'s sometime caricature-ish portrayal of the culturally and ethnically diverse cast of characters: some of them take themselves too seriously, some of them don't think much of themselves or of their surroundings, but in the author made even the most self-conscious characters be a little self-deprecating in a humorous way. Details are thrown at the reader either purposefully and effectively, or in a way that adds more color to the writing. Upon reading the book, I felt that it's alright to take one's self seriously, and it's alright if one doesn't, but that we should both respect and take some humor in our diversity. In "White Teeth" I felt that the author used diversity as a very good tool to make captivate the reader's interest, propel the story along, introduce conflict, and introduce humor all at the same time.

In "On Beauty", there is still that sprinkling of ethnic and cultural details, strong and minute, but they are more often neither necessary nor effective. It seems that taking all the ethnic, gender, and cultural aspects from this novel will not subtract much from it. The wit is still there, the cartoonish portrayals of certain archetypes and stereotypes are still there, but they are disconnected from the storyline. I have not read the original inspiration of this story, so perhaps I am missing something here, but if I hadn't read "White Teeth" I will still have written the same about "On Beauty".

If you have read "White Teeth" and really enjoyed it, then "On Beauty" is worth the price of admission. If you have not read "White Teeth" and know Zadie Smith only from book reviews and interviews, I will only hesitatingly recommend this book. Perhaps it is Smith's familiarity with the British way of life that makes "White Teeth" appear to be a more integral and effortless piece of writing, but both aspects are lacking in this latest novel.

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