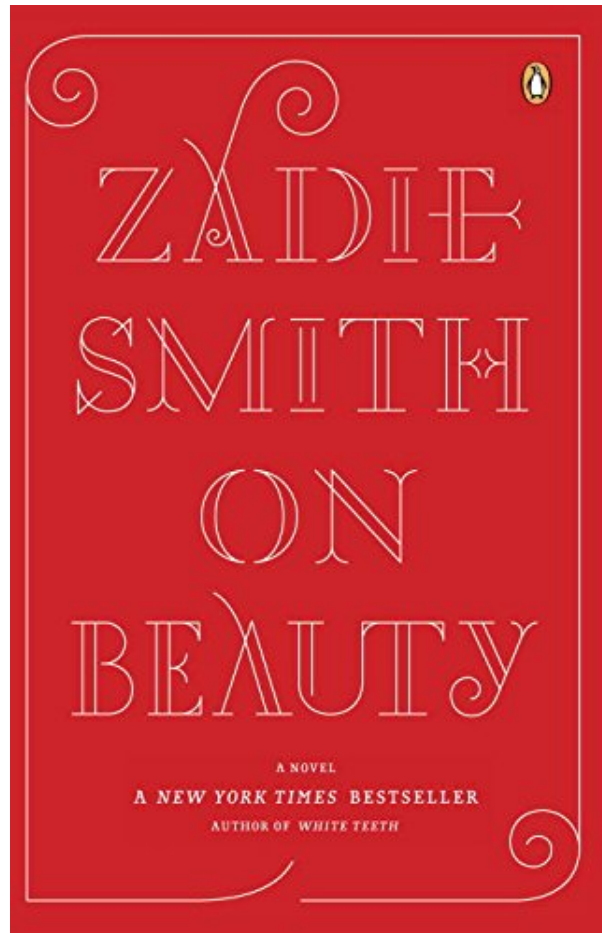
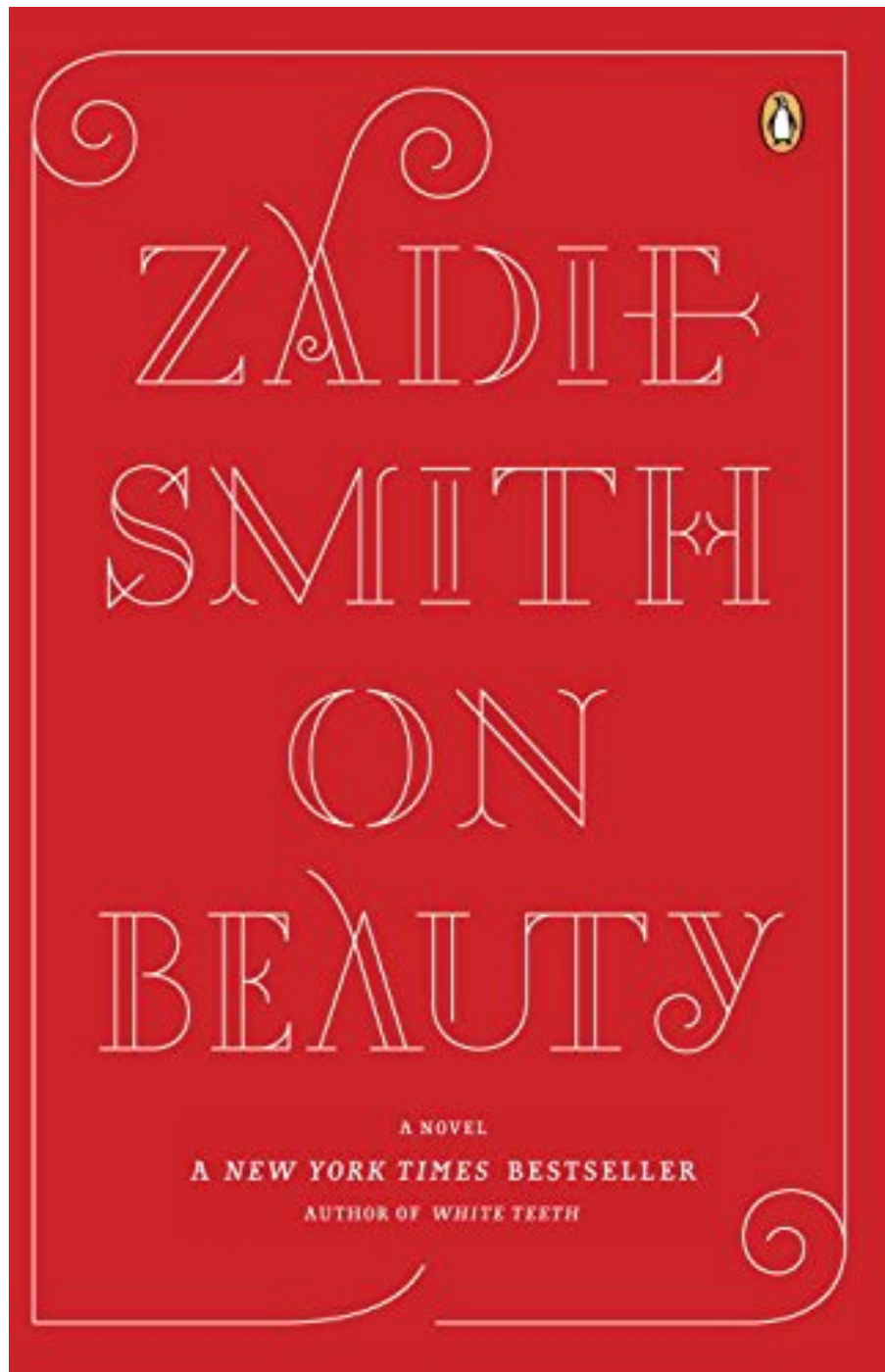


ON BEAUTY: A NOVEL BY ZADIE SMITH



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ON BEAUTY: A NOVEL BY ZADIE SMITH PDF

Winner of the 2006 Orange Prize for fiction and from the celebrated author of *White Teeth* comes another bestselling masterwork

Having hit bestseller lists from the *New York Times* to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, this wise, hilarious novel reminds us why Zadie Smith has rocketed to literary stardom. *On Beauty* is the story of an interracial family living in the university town of Wellington, Massachusetts, whose misadventures in the culture wars—on both sides of the Atlantic—serve to skewer everything from family life to political correctness to the combustive collision between the personal and the political. Full of dead-on wit and relentlessly funny, this tour de force confirms Zadie Smith's reputation as a major literary talent.

Named one of the Ten Best Books of the Year by the *New York Times Book Review*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Time*, and *Publishers Weekly* A *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Denver Post*, and *Publishers Weekly* bestseller A *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Newsday*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Minneapolis Star Tribune* Best Book of the Year Short-listed for the Man Booker Prize
BACKCOVER: Praise for *On Beauty*:

"A thoroughly original tale . . . wonderfully engaging, wonderfully observed . . . That rare thing: a novel that is as affecting as it is entertaining, as provocative as it is humane."

-Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

"A thing of beauty. Oh happy day when a writer as gifted as Zadie Smith fulfills her early promise with a novel as accomplished, substantive and penetrating as *On Beauty*."

-Los Angeles Times

"Smith's specialty is her ability to render the new world, in its vibrant multiculturalism, with a kind of dancing, daring joy. . . . Her plots and people sing with life. . . . One of the best of the year, a splendid treat."

-Chicago Tribune

"Short-listed for [the 2005] Man Booker Prize, *On Beauty* is a rollicking satire . . . a tremendously good read."

-San Francisco Chronicle

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Features

- Great product!

Amazon.com Review

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Most helpful customer reviews

145 of 164 people found the following review helpful.

Not Great

By Eva La

This book has its moments-- bits of lovely writing, occasional insightful moments, some good laughs. It wasn't a page turner, but I'm not sorry I read it. The book also has a lot of problems, and they distract from the reading experience. The most notable problem, is, as others have pointed out, the terrible and terribly overdone dialect. The southern graduate student's speech is ridiculous and laughable. Levi's is as well-- and I'm giving Smith credit here by assuming it was supposed to be bad dialect, a middle class black American kid emulating slang, but it fails to accurately capture that. Levi speaks like no person in the history of ever, and would be laughed out of his house AND off of any street corner. Moreover, the characters never really come to life-- and this was a book about types I recognized and wanted to like. The Belsey's feel like walking lessons, and fall into cliché. Their feelings are never clear unless they're explicitly telling you why they are the way they are. For a while, the sweeping tone of the book and frequent point of view shifts distract from this, but eventually you want a character to hold onto, and there isn't one. The Kipps' are even worse, seeming to exist solely as foils for the Belsey's. Their conservatism and Christianity are so shallow and underutilized from the beginning that the subsequent exposure of hypocrisy doesn't pack any sort of punch. No one feels fully imagined. Characters can state a worldview or a self perception, but when all of the characters have to explicitly announce their politics and purposes all the time, it's a problem. More problematically, the pivotal scene of the book isn't really written. It's as if Smith got to the book's climax, realized it was already at least a hundred pages too long, and rushed the ending. Kiki's decision never feels real, and the final scene seems to indicate that there's been a good deal of forgiveness on the part of the children, something that seems unlikely.

I'm not sure that this book would be great even with better editing and dialogue. I think we've gotten to the

point in literature where we pat an author on the back for even bothering with the "big questions." This book isn't really telling us anything new, and it seems confused about what it wants its reader to take away. Ok, beauty standards are varied, and in one way or another dominate women's lives. Pretty girls have problems because they're too pretty and ugly girls have problems because they're not pretty enough. OK... and? It's amazing that in a book about appearances, we never know what anyone looks like, aside from basic physical shape. What does Zora look like, besides big? Why is it that Kiki still gets hit on in black neighborhoods, even with the extra weight, but Zora is invisible to the opposite sex? What does it mean that Victoria isn't just a pretty girl, she's a pretty, dark-skinned black girl in a world where that's still often seen as a rarity or contradiction? Is her sexuality a rebellion against her family, and if so why does she side with them in key decisions? Race creates identity issues, especially when mixed with class issues... and? This book doesn't tell us anything new about middle class kids trying to pass themselves off as poor, or interracial families having racial tension. It's not enough to have provocative material, or to have big issues-- you've still got to do something with them, and this book really doesn't.

78 of 88 people found the following review helpful.

Black America? Southern?

By Sula

Other reviewers have covered most of what I consider problematic about this book. What bothered me most was that Kiki is a black, Southern woman with absolutely no connection to any black Southern woman I've known or seen. Other reviewers have criticized Smith for her inauthentic dialogue. The inauthenticity extends beyond the dialogue. Smith knows little to nothing about black Southerners. Her description of "soul food," in the book is unrecognizable to any "soul food" emanating from the South. When she has Kiki reverting to her Southern roots, her dialogue, culture, etc. are markedly more Caribbean instead of Southern. The Belsey children speak slang that is Caribbean, not Southern. To some, this may be a minor point, but since Kiki's Florida roots are a central part of her character, that they weren't authentic is troubling.

A sabbatical in New England does not make Smith an authority able to accurately critique American culture, especially black-American culture.

60 of 70 people found the following review helpful.

Wasted Talent

By Winifred M. Kostroun

I just finished reading "On Beauty" after several friends recommended "White Teeth" and I found Smith to be an enormously talented writer who does not humanize her characters. It is hard to say that she does not flesh them out, we do hear their voices but we cannot relate to them except as objects of Smith's satire. There is nothing wrong with writing a purely satirical work but she is trying for something more here and it does not work. After introducing her characters we are ready to enjoy their humor, their failures, their triumphs and eventually their redemptions but, alas, the book ends on a note of cheap revenge that is decidedly unpleasant. She makes some attempts to honor these characters but Smith's basic cynicism does not allow her to do so. I believe Smith believes she is transcending stereotypes by portraying a mixed race marriage and young black intellectuals. Why is it then that Howard, a white, working class man ultimately fails in his dream career and as a family man, that a beautiful, smart black student is portrayed as a sexual predator destroying lives around her. Did Smith so hate her time in America that she has her character Victoria destroy so many lives from the minute she lands here? And on and on with each character whether black or white. One wants to like these characters but she just won't let us. Two scenes I did think were brilliant - the way Claire, the teacher of poetry interacts with her students especially during their evening at The Bus Stop, and the department head making introductory remarks at a faculty meeting with a one line cameo appearance by Smith herself.

Ultimately, this is a mean book with mean characters that leaves a bad taste in one's mouth. I would have

given it one star only that Zadie Smith is a brilliant writer. I would say to her "channel your anger, give us believable characters that we can care about". Zadie Smith needs to grow up.

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