

## The Forster Connection or, Cosmopolitanism Redux: Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, *Howards End*, and the Schlegels

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### Abstract:

To be sure, *On Beauty* can be read as a tribute to Forster, on several levels. An exquisite response to *Howards End*, the novel repays Smith's debt with cultural interest, so to speak, by retelling Forster's story for the new millennium's globalizing world, with the politically conservative, religious-minded Caribbean-British Kippseys and the racially mixed, more liberal American Belseys playing in today's Boston the parts the British writer assigns the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels, respectively, in *Howards End*'s early twentieth-century London. What is more, Smith's intertextual tour-de-force has a precise focus. As I argue, her novel's "Forster connection" sets out to foreground connectedness itself; it is this concept and the whole array of cosmopolitan cultural-emotional experiences associated with it that, through Foster, *On Beauty* "drags" into our time (Caldwell).

**Keywords:** Literary Analysis | E.M. Foster | *Howard's End* | Zadie Smith | *On Beauty* | Culture | Cosmopolitanism

### Article:

*We know this is our house, because it feels ours.*

E.M. Forster, *Howards End*

I

"There is such shelter in each other," Carlene tells her friend Kiki in Zadie Smith's 2005 novel *On Beauty* (93). The sentence, critics have been quick to point out, can be traced to *Howards End*'s famous epigraph and chapter 22 passage: "Only connect! ... Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is

life to either, will die" (168). Smith herself has acknowledged, in fact, that "from the first line, ... this is a novel inspired by a love for E.M. Forster, to whom my all fiction is indebted, one way or the other." "This time," she goes on specify, "I wanted to repay the debt with *hommage*" (Smith, *On Beauty* "Acknowledgements").<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, *On Beauty* can be read as a tribute to Forster, on several levels. An exquisite response to *Howards End*, the novel repays Smith's debt with cultural interest, so to speak, by retelling Forster's story for the new millennium's globalizing world, with the politically conservative, religious-minded Caribbean-British Kippses and the racially mixed, more liberal American Belseys playing in today's Boston the parts the British writer assigns the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels, respectively, in *Howards End*'s early twentieth-century London. What is more, Smith's intertextual tour-de-force has a precise focus. As I argue, her novel's "Forster connection" sets out to foreground connectedness itself; it is this concept and the whole array of cosmopolitan cultural-emotional experiences associated with it that, through Foster, *On Beauty* "drags" into our time (Caldwell).

In Smith, the world is a world of relations rather than an assemblage of separate entities. We live fully, she suggests, to the extent that we make connections and relate to one another. In her view, relationality is world rationality, the very formula of being. To be is to be with others. In her 2000 international bestseller, this defining togetherness is profoundly engrained in minds and bodies alike, in people's notions and complexions, in their words and teeth, in linguistic roots and tooth roots. Deep as these roots may be, in *White Teeth* they are intertwined with other roots and thus make selfhood impossible to isolate as a discrete ontological and cultural unit. The harder one digs—the deeper Smith's narrative "root canals"—the more the vertical cut through a self's biography proves to be a cross-section through other biographies, individual and collective, and the political and ethical bearings of this revelation cannot be underestimated. *White Teeth* explicitly cautions us that, considering the heteroclit architecture of who we are, literal self-engendering—"autogamy," Smith calls it—is philosophically dubious, a repression of or cover for a process the author seizes as "cross-pollinating" (257). So is, of course, *White Teeth* itself, a fictional cross-pollination in its own right, what with its Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi textual implants. So is Smith's next novel too, *The Autograph Man*, where one of the main heroes, Alex, is a "philograph," a collector and trader of autographs—others' quintessential writings, as it were—but also a writer, of late at work on a book of sorts listing in two separate (yet inevitably overlapping) columns all things "typically" Jewish and gentile. No less cross-pollinating is *On Beauty*.

What draws Smith to Forster and, in particular, to the 1910 classic is her precursor's relational imagination and, behind it, his uniquely cosmopolitan mindset. The connection is just one among many setting forth the strong emphasis Forster places on disinterested ties, friendship and affective bonds, human affiliations, and generally on the other's nurturing proximity to the self no matter how far apart the two may be by location, ethnoracial background, or political allegiance. Significantly, in Forster (the modernist esthete of the Edwardian age, the closeted

homosexual and sometimes critic of the British Empire, and the lover of Italian and Indian culture) the Jamaican-British writer finds a generous model of worldliness and sociality that she extends to a place and time where such values seem in short supply. We shall note, the dearth of connectedness and of those others without whom neither connection nor self can develop becomes for Smith a matter of ethics as much as aesthetics. Also typical of her version of cosmopolitanism is an existential, historical, intertextual approach to connectedness. For she tackles the latter with help from others: Elaine Scarry's 1999 *On Beauty and Being Just*—from which Smith's *On Beauty* borrows more than just its title—and, first and foremost, *Howards End* (Smith, *On Beauty* "Acknowledgements").

While Smith does not use Forster's title too, one of her lead characters is *Howard* Belsey, and the novel does *end* with him lecturing, assisted by "Smith," his graduate student, on Rembrandt before colleagues and friends at Wellington College. Although *On Beauty* has Howard admit that he "can't stand Forster" (298), the ending is just another Forsterian clue, one more time decoding Smith's text as a narrative rereading of *Howards End*. This rereading gets under way from the outset, with the e-mail Howard receives from his son, Jerome. Critics like Gérard Genette would probably advise against ignoring the real "threshold"—and code breaker—of Smith's fictional world, namely, the H.J. Blackham motto to the novel, "We refuse to be each other." No doubt, the line can be read in more than one way, but, via Forster, Smith prompts us to take it as an invitation not to be *like* each other, i.e., interchangeable, but to imagine ourselves in the other's place so as to be there *for* one another and so, at last, be ourselves to the fullest.

Place, more exactly residential place, holds in *Howards End* a truly pivotal role. The place identified in the title of Forster's novel is unquestionably more than an address. It is a bonding space, a domain of female "comradship" (Forster's own word) and cradle of an evolving, cross-cultural and cross-topological women's tradition. Serving to Ruth Wilcox as the one-time companion and "spiritual heir" Kiki Belsey is to Carlene Kipps, Margaret Schlegel is hardly committed to feminism yet vows that "if men came into Howards End it should be over her body" (98, 248). She does not dislike "men"—including men like Henry Wilcox, whom she marries following Ruth's death—but the narrow-minded authoritarians both Henry and his son Charles prove they can be. Their authority expresses itself in a blend of male chauvinism, jingoism, and self-centered, materialist and individualist localism whose explicit target is, time and over again, early twentieth-century philosophies and practices of cosmopolitanism.

If Margaret's slogan is "connect," "My motto," Henry promptly replies, "is Concentrate." He makes no apologies either: "I've no intention of frittering away my strength with that sort of thing" (168). "It's no frittering away the strength," Margaret protests his dismissal of "connections," but "enlarging the space in which you may be strong" (168). Strength, Henry implies, comes from inside. It issues from within the individual and *his* culture, from the only concentrated space in which people can apply themselves, concentrate, and succeed even though, like Henry, they eventually wind up taking over other spaces for political and economic benefit. They act with a markedly masculine authority and assert it topologically as they monopolize

space, excluding from it undesirable presences such as women and aliens. In this regard (theirs), Howards End makes for a political synecdoche of the UK, an autarchically authoritarian and patriarchal *mise-en-abyme* of British society. Not unlike the latter, the place is not to be opened or "left" to an "outsider, who'd never appreciate" it anyway, according to Henry and his son. On this account, in "conveying" Howards End to Margaret, they decide that "Mrs. Wilcox had been treacherous to the family, to the laws of property, to her own written word" (99). In Henry's view, a self coalesces as it fills out and lays exclusive claim to a determinate place. Intellectual and cultural self-possession and ownership of the place are co-extensive; both are absolute and absolutely "allergic" (allergy, the Ancient Greek etymon teaches us, is an adverse reaction to "others," *álloi*). Instead, Margaret believes we truly come into our own only when we open up ourselves and our homes to others, or seek them out at their places. There are surely dangers we need to be aware of such as conquest, subjugation of others and their lands, and the like. After all, Margaret is not unaware of what cosmopolitanism itself might become—and did become—at the hands of empire: like the latter, a source of worldly "grayness" (276), a "caricature of infinity" not unlike the modern metropolis of London (242).

In both Edwardian London and Forster's novel, socialism, equitable distribution of wealth, women's rights, and cosmopolitanism are hotly debated topics. Tibby, Margaret's brother, proclaims himself a cosmopolitan (146), and Helen, his sister, acts like one pointedly. Margaret, however, suspects that contemporary cosmopolites live cut off from "earth" (227), all "dust, and a stink, and cosmopolitan chatter" (190). They could not care less about other people. The "English," she thinks, is a "better vein than the cosmopolitan" (145), which, however, does not prevent Charles from pegging her as a "cosmopolitan," and a "German cosmopolitan" to boot, exactly the kind of type he "cannot stand" (100).

Charles's apprehension is worth pondering. In a sense, he is right. The Schlegels, Margaret included, represent an interesting "type" of cosmopolite. To Mrs. Munt, they are "English to the backbone" (25) and thereby distinct from the Germans, whom Margaret herself deems "too thorough," even though, we have noticed, "thoroughness" can be equally a mark of Englishness. In any event, the "thorough" is the cosmopolitan's flip side in that it tends to leave little room for ambiguity, experiment, and adventure, for the alternatives and the outsiders who usually try them out first. Thoroughness evokes the completion of an itinerary, a spatial voluntarism that implies carrying through a certain project as well as the projection into and over space, now adjudicated (mine) through and through, completely and for that reason exclusively, and marked as such geopolitically and culturally. The thorough kind invariably completes its actions and follows "through" because it concentrates in Henry's sense of the term, that is, it acts with limited purview and within limited space, and is if not hostile at least indifferent to others and their locations. Thoroughness and self-centeredness are thus equivalent and, also in this context, other names for provincialism.

They are also what Margaret's father had sought to leave behind when he moved to England. Oddly enough, however, imperial and acquisitive England is now turning into the Germany he

had fled. Neither country embodies cosmopolitanism, nor is either its antithesis. In Forster, the cosmopolitan can be, in principle at least, nowhere and everywhere but not in an "uprooted," disembodied, and free-floating way. It lies in-between, much like the Schlegel sisters' type, which falls somewhere between the "English to the backbone" and the "Germans of the dreadful sort" (41). Indeed, cosmopolitanism is not confined to a place insofar as it eludes the logic of thoroughness and imperial (German, British, etc.) adjudication. It goes without saying, it cannot be *of* a place, cannot be *one* place's monopoly no matter how "concentrated" human presence and its culture may be in that point in space. For, its own logic, its *other* logic, does not develop discretely or punctually, in or at unconnected points but rather in aggregate structures that draw the separate dots together. At odds with self-absorbed, concentration and its "fragmentary" *Weltanschauung*, cosmopolitan culture largely comes "after" fragments, and this is exactly what Margaret means when she urges Henry not to live "in fragments" any more. In contrast, imperial cosmopolitanism, whether spatial or cultural, consists of a threatening totality insofar as it further concentrates and centralizes, levels out, and thus marks the global onset of "gray" at the expense of the offbeat, atypical, incomplete, less-than-thorough, and emotionally composed. Smith's cosmopolitan parable, to which Forsterian intertextuality is so instrumental, reacts subtly if vigorously to this threat. In order to understand this reaction, a brief historical sketch of cosmopolitanism's totalist claims is in order.

## II

Cosmopolitan claims have received renewed attention of late, so much so that some critics use "cosmopolitanism" and "globalization" synonymously. Others refer to cosmopolitan cultural-aesthetic practices (which may or may not include consumption) and political philosophies, setting aside the global terminology to talk about material production and its economy, finance, trade, labor aspects, and transnational corporations. Along the lines of a division of which many have grown weary, cosmopolitanism is to globalization what superstructure is to base in old-fashioned Marxism. Along similar lines, cosmopolites need not (although they often do) leave their separate locations to converge on common interests, hobbies, and lifestyles whereas jet-setting bankers and Nike CEOs fly out of central, highly integrated quarters to further integrate the world by wrapping it around their corporate fantasies of universal interchange. One is, the argument goes, adamant about difference and such as, appearances notwithstanding, centrifugal. Catering to an "established centrality," the other is manifestly centripetal and demonstrably de-differentiating in its worldwide, indeed globalizing effects (Lefebvre 365).

I am all for heuristic simplifications, and this one is as helpful as any. Before accepting it, however, we should remember that the *ecumene* is not only the Greek word but also the world envisioned and conquered by the Greeks in the mid-fourth-century BC. With Alexander the Great's campaigns, the *ecumene* becomes both outcome *and* vehicle of Hellenization and, ironically enough, has remained so in the only history of cosmopolitanism available, Peter Coulmas's 1990 *Weltbürger: Geschichte einer Menschheitssehnsucht*, which, the occasional references to Alexander's "Hellenizing" cosmopolitanism notwithstanding, is Eurocentric in its

"national[ist] universalism," and Western cosmopolitanism "Eurocentrism," if not Hellenocentric. The historian takes Plutarch's point that the Macedonian made Zeno's dream of "cosmopolitanism" come true," but the "universalism" of this "idea" no less than of the imperial enterprise the idea fueled are glossed over (66, 301–04, 59). Classical cosmopolitanism is universalist, but, in spite of what the old Stoics, eighteenth-century *philosophes*, or Julien Benda's "bona fide," pre-*Volkgeist*-era *clerics* may say about slaves, women, and foreigners, this universalism has repeatedly issued empires an expansionist free pass. Alexander's ideal of doing away with the distinction between Greek and "barbarian" and, centuries later, Marcus Aurelius's desire to abolish the "difference between here and there" (Marcus Aurelius 136) were more than idealistic dreams. Recent cosmopolitan studies have shown repeatedly what privileged terms such as "cultural hybridity," "religious syncretism," "linguistic creolization," and other cross-and multicultural formations actually meant and what the elimination of difference actually entailed in imperial history.

To this history, it bears stressing that cosmopolitanism has been complicitous. Generation after generation of Western thinkers and artists have drawn the Stoic concentric circles of belonging, with "we" natively and "naturally" at the center—the ecumenical world's *omphalós*—bound by blood and birthplace but also by our self-assigned task of pacifying, civilizing, democratizing, and otherwise rationalizing people elsewhere. Herein lies cosmopolitanism's perennial quandary: while it deems the inner circles as narrow, provincial, and sectarian, it remains trapped inside them. Moreover, it enlarges and drags them all over the planet, enveloping the global *ecumene* precisely in the culturo-centric *dóxes* that cosmopolites profess to leave behind. In short, under its universalist rhetoric of "immutable" and "common" human values (Benda 85, 98–100), cosmopolitanism has often been an extrapolation, a totalizing attempt. In it, a colonization of sorts going on not only as economic and cultural globalization but also under the guise of self-styled cosmopolitan critiques thereof. Of course, if we define the cosmopolite as the person who acquires an education through, knowledge of, taste for, and formation in texts, values, and proclivities either alien or only considered alien to those inherited by background (native country, language, descent, religion, etc.), in sum, as the person who comes to be what he or she is through exposure to the discourse of others, then we should admit that cultural-aesthetic cosmopolitanism participates in the Westernization of the world less or less directly than, say, Jesuit missionaryism. Common sense asks that we distinguish between the influence of a cosmopolitan movement like the European avantgarde on the *négritude* proponent Aimé Césaire and the impact of Christian missionaries on African religions. Besides, a strong case can be made (and has been made) for a broadly polycultural, anti-metropolitan strain *within* European modernism. But overall cosmopolitanism's professed universalism and internationalism prove lopsided or, one-sidedly wedded to the Eurocentric, colonizing, and leveling underbelly of modern rationality. It appears socially exclusive rather than inclusive. In spite of its declared intentions, cosmopolitanism rarely manages to derail the geocultural processes whose fundamental premises it shares. For this reason, critics from Timothy Brennan to John Carlos Rowe have not refrained from calling today's cosmopolitans "neo-imperialist," and for the same

reason Peter Van der Veer thinks it is ironic "to see" cosmopolitanism "celebrat[ed] in some post-colonial writing without any critical reflection on the genealogy of the concept" (169). Indeed, rigorous historical analysis cannot miss the mutual reinforcement of cosmopolitanism and colonialism. While the former served more than once as the metropolis's cultural arm, the latter, Coulmas concedes, fostered the "conditions necessary to cosmopolitanism's development on a global scale" (205).

"Development" is misleading, though, if, as we learn from the same source, "the content of cosmopolitan thought does not change" after Saint Paul, Augustine, and the spiritual founding of "Christopolis" (169). Note that Christopolis was to *kosmópolis* what Christian was to fourth-century BC Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope's *kosmopolítes* ("citizen of the world") (Heater 7). As a rationalist-universalist (and thus "Greek," Euro-centered) philosophy of the human and a project of global scope, cosmopolitanism becomes also "catholic" (*katholikós* or "universal") in a more broadly Christian sense. In its dominant texts and geopolitical embodiments, it remains so throughout its multi-millennial career in spite of successful attempts to uncover cosmopolitan traditions in non-Christian and non-Western cultures.<sup>3</sup> I share critics' reluctance to "specif[y] cosmopolitanism positively and definitely"—hence their talk of cosmopolitanisms instead of cosmopolitanism (Breckenridge 1)—and I do appreciate the insistence with which Mitchell Cohen, Bruce Ackerman, Walter Dignolo, Jeremy Waldron, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Ali Rattansi, Gita Rajan, Shailja Sharma, Jigna Desai, Philip Leonard, Stuart Hall, K. Anthony Appiah, Michael Cronin, Julia Kristeva, Bruce Robbins, and others have argued for "vernacular cosmopolitanism, rooted cosmopolitanism, critical cosmopolitanism, comparative cosmopolitanism, national cosmopolitanism, discrepant cosmopolitanism, situated cosmopolitanism, ... actually existing cosmopolitanism," not to mention more intricate, theoretical-terminological reformations such as "cosmopolitan patriotism, cosmopolitan nationalism, cosmopolitan democracy[,] and cosmopolitan post-colonialism" (Hollinger 228).

There is an ironic undertow to David Hollinger's roll call, but the irony is not uniformly warranted. I am quite willing to allow, in fact, that belittling such post-Cold War endeavors to query, retool, and diversify the Stoic-Enlightenment-based cosmopolitan paradigm around diversity itself and attendant "soft" "micro-cosmopolitanisms" would definitely be an "uncosmopolitan thing to do" (Breckenridge 1).<sup>4</sup> After all, the questions raised by contemporary students of cosmopolitanism are both capital and timely: What does it mean to be a cosmopolite these days? If it no longer means only a white, male, upper-crust Western affair, then what kind or kinds of cosmopolitanism have become or are becoming prevalent, necessary, or obsolete? The Cynics' and Stoics' world citizenship? The rational-Kantian cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment? The modernist-aesthetic cosmopolitanism of the late nineteenth-early twentieth-century, in the James-Wilde-Pound-Joyce-Stein-"lost generation"-"Vienna Circle" line? Non-Western—or not Western-only—post-imperial, religion-, ethnicity-, and profession-based cosmopolitanisms such as those of the new collectivities and sodalities of nomads, migrant laborers, peace-keepers, charity workers, academics, activists, refugees, exiles, pilgrims, and

NGO personnel perhaps? Would any of these respond to the conditions and priorities of twenty-first century globalization?

### III

Smith turns to Forster and, more specifically, to Forster's own "homage" to the great romantics August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel in an attempt to reimagine cosmopolitanism and its relational philosophy for our global era. Although cosmopolitan despite its anti-cosmopolitan rhetoric, Margaret's exhortation represents an indirect paean to her father and, through him, a salute to the other Schlegels often mentioned apropos of Margaret, Helen, and Tibby. Few have noticed, however, that Forster not only "borro[ws] Margaret and Helen's patronymic from the Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel," but that the German thinker's "early thought becomes the (unelaborated) touchstone for their beliefs" as the novel "elevates his value for personal relationships and love to such heights that they just might overcome world-historical problems such as the fate of [British] Empire" at the dawn of the last century.<sup>5</sup> The English Schlegels' *pater* refers the reader quite transparently to their German patrons. He was, most tellingly, a "distant relation of the great critic [Friedrich] Schlegel," as we learn from an earlier version of the novel (Miller 195),<sup>6</sup> and also a cultural relay in a cross-national tradition of relatedness, hinting at the notion of a family of spirits and ideals, in which intellectual and emotional ties may outreach those grounded in shared birthplace, mother tongue, or ethnicity. "He was not," *Howards End* assures us, "the aggressive German, so dear to the English journalist, nor the domestic German, so dear to the English wit. If one classed him at all it would be as the countryman of Hegel and Kant, as the idealist, inclined to be dreamy, whose Imperialism was the Imperialism of the air" (41). Dismayed by "bigness," "Pan-Germanism," and the utilitarian "thoroughness" of the "vulgar mind" deprived of the "imagination" (42), the quasi-"unclassifiable" German is of a sort "that was more prominent in Germany fifty years ago than now" (41).

August Wilhelm died in 1845 and Friedrich sixteen year before, but in mid-nineteenth-century German culture this character type was undeniably influential. Alongside Hölderlin, Jean Paul, Novalis, Schelling, and others, the Schlegels themselves illustrated the so-called "Herder effect" (Casanova 77–81), having formulated after Herder a two-pronged romantic aesthetics that sought, on the one hand, to identify an independent, distinct profile for German literature and rising national literatures across Europe, to "nationalize" and define in specific terms the continent's emerging cultures, and on the other, to deal with modern literature comparatively, in international and historical contexts of co-dependence, by "connecting" recent and Ancient, European and Asian traditions philologically. The duality of the project lived on beyond Herder's time and became increasingly troublesome as German nationalism escalated and the imperialism abhorred by Margaret's father took root. But overall Forster is right to stress the supranational, "synthetic" element. Friedrich Schlegel theorized romanticism itself as a new if incomplete and fluctuant synthesis, a rhetoric of connectivity capable of taking on, although not necessarily overcoming the fragmentation of modern life. On this topic he composed his own *Fragmente*,

along with other works published in the *Lyceum* and *Athenäeum* in the late 1790s and the first years of the next century.

In an essay on the Schlegelian aesthetic of the fragment, J. Hillis Miller suggests that "If [Schlegel's] fragments are really fragments, they cannot be joined together in a chain, garland, or system. However they are assembled, they still remain a contiguous set of incompatibles. It would be a dangerous mistake, for example, to try to use a chain of fragments to anchor a boat. They just cannot be connected to one another in a way that will hold. A chain of fragments is a chain that does not enchain or concatenate" (8). Neither part of a whole nor a whole onto itself, a "true fragment" is for Schlegel, according to Miller, a "catachresic allegory," a figure of the "wholly other" or, what the German idealist calls "chaos." The point is, of course, to "sublate," to abolish while also somewhat preserving this chaos so as to convert it into a positive value, a structure likely to capture some of its swarming plurality and irreducible meaning.

Following his conversion to Catholicism late in life, Schlegel himself tried to rewrite his own fragmentary thoughts into a clarifying synthesis, but the attempt met with questionable success. However, Schlegel's early wrestling with the concept of chaos as an ontological given as well as a moral and aesthetic challenge would prove consequential for Forster and his characters. The fragment dares us to acknowledge the incomplete, unconnected, isolated, and "sheltered" mode of existence as a reality of life that at the same time aims beyond fragmentariness, isolation, and parochialism by opening our own selves and places to others. Margaret's "Live in fragments no longer" injunction recognizes the fragment with all that it implies and thus points to a form of sociality—rather than a firm social synthesis—in which fragments, individuals, and cultural models link up and support one another *mindful of each other's incompleteness and distinctiveness*. For, giving shelter to an other, if authentic, entails sheltering the other's otherness itself and thereby stops short of taking the other in "thoroughly," assimilating it into the host. Assimilation and the descent into non-distinction characterize the kind of imperial (i.e. uniformity-inducing, economic, cultural) cosmopolitanism that Margaret casts aside. These interpersonal ties take us into a "gray" world and eventually "outside humanity altogether" (Forster 287) because humanness quintessentially inheres in variety and distinctions. Without them, it loses its aura, its "glow." Still, "[A] place, as well as a person, may catch the glow," she tells Helen, and "this all leads to comfort in the end." "It is," she discloses, "part of the battle against sameness. Differences are planted by God in a single family, so that there may always be colour; sorrow perhaps, but colour in the daily gray" (287). Following her father and his philosophical patrons, Margaret recommends nurturing those connections that contribute to a chromatic, mosaic-like world where people connect because they recognize their differences and, in doing so, feel for each other. Difference, they suspect, provides a *common* language. It provides the bond, the ethical as well as the aesthetical glue holding together a world of "beauty and adventure" (281); we talk to one another and are with each other through or across our differences.

While acknowledging in the *Howards End* chapter of *Others* that Forster names his characters after illustrious romantics, Miller opines that readers will have to decide for themselves what to make of this, for "the book will not clearly decide" (195). The critic does make his decision, however, when he contends that in *Howards End* "the otherness of race, nationality, class, and gender can in one way or another, by tolerance and sympathy, be reduced to the same." "This is true," he explains, "in spite of Forster's celebration of difference. The nation-, class-, and gender-grounded other can be comprehended and so incorporated, at least in principle, into an ideal society such as Margaret and Helen Schlegel imagine as their utopian goal" (199). But it seems to me that the *Howards End* passages reproduced above, which Miller also discusses, lend themselves to an "other" sort of reading, and they are hardly isolated in the novel's Friedrich Schlegel-derived economy of otherness. Further, it is this economy itself that tips the balance in favor of an ethical "decision" that the novel also makes. This decision, Miller himself recognizes, gives pride of place to the "unseen" and the "obscure," the "unknown" and the "invisible." In other words, it acknowledges a "wholly other" (200) whose features fit almost perfectly the description of Schlegel's "chaos" and thus of the fragmentary. Margaret contradicts herself more than once in much the same manner as her philosophical ancestor did (to Hegel's despair). She does not, however, advocate sameness, nor does the novel push "assimilation." What they both by and large promote is the world, its places and human associations—homes, families, communities—as domains and regimens connecting entities who are held together emotionally by their fundamental humanness, to wit, as specified earlier, by that which in each of us affords our individuality, makes us different from one another, and thus ultimately if paradoxically sets us apart culturally and otherwise.

It is this "differential" cosmopolitanism that draws Forster to the Schlegels and Smith to Forster, the culture of linkages that boost life's colorfulness and make the world more hospitable and more beautiful at the same time. Carlene, Kiki, and Howard himself are not immune to the bright radiance of this world, to the heart-warming aura that renders the different, the un-assimilated, the un-conceptualized, and the mysterious out of reach for the instinctively rationalizing self yet no less approachable or worthy of care and shelter. As in Forster, the moral and the beautiful are the two faces of the same coin. They share the same space, which thus defines itself as a site of sharing, not a surface or "acreage" but an affective structure, a cultural-affective node of feelings and bonds. The space is the same, yet it does not induce uniformity. Blackham's "We refuse to be each other" ventriloquizes Margaret's apprehension of sameness—this refusal is, after all, a rejection of equivalence quite literally—while deploring separation, "discreteness," and disinterest in the other's welfare. For, indeed, "There is such a shelter in each other," or there should be, regardless of what Monty Kipps, Smith's version of Henry Wilcox, means when he quotes Sartre's *Huis clos* and its infamous dictum "L'enfer, c'est les autres," "hell is others" (*On Beauty* 94).

There seem to be the two ethical poles in Smith's novel. I say "seem" because the contrast is far from absolute, based as it is on a misreading of the famous citation, which the French

philosopher himself insisted had been "misunderstood." What he meant was not that our "relations with others are tainted," troublesome, and "infernal" by definition but that *if* these relations are indeed "twisted, vitiated, then the other can be to us nothing else than hell." That is "because in reality the others are the most important thing within ourselves that we can draw from to know who we are." "When we think about ourselves, when we try to find out who we are" Sartre clarifies his paradox, "we actually use the knowledge others already have of us. We form an opinion of ourselves by means of tools others have given us. Whatever I say about myself, an other's judgment is always contained in it. This means that if my relations with an other are bad, I am completely dependent on this other. And then I am truly in hell."<sup>7</sup> Forster and Smith refute this sort of subjection of self to the other and the other to the self. There is no hierarchical "dependence" they argue but a co-dependence and ethical relation, which are precisely what Sartre intended to underscore. In this light, we do not have a choice: our selves have always sheltered others and their views, which we have used to view and represent ourselves, and stake claims to our identities. We develop a proprietary sense of our being and place as we borrow from others and let them into our lives and thoughts. We shelter them as much as they lend us the shelter of their minds. They allow us to make up our own minds and thus come to terms with the secret of our beings. This is an intellectual and affective process of inclusion, pertaining as it does to psychology, morals, as well as aesthetics. Throughout his career, Howard endeavored to "recast Aesthetics as a rarefied language of exclusion" (*Howards End* 155), with beauty as elusive and forbidding as the unfathomable shadows of a Rembrandt painting. Opposed to this understanding of art is Carlene and Kiki's passion for the Jean Hyppolite painting, which the older woman leaves the younger one, with a transparent nod to the testamentary nexus between Ruth and Margaret in *Howards End*.

The ample use of intertextuality suggests that Smith's reading of Forster's reading of the Schlegels reworks *Howards End's* cosmopolitan discourse of connectedness into a "neocosmopolitan" vision. Margaret's struggle to associate disparate and often conflicting values such as practicality and aesthetic sensibility, "prose" and "poetry," "England" and "Germany," and thus expand the network of people, ideas, and feelings across the barriers of class, ethnicity, geography, and culture is undercut by the networks of exploitation, inequality, and pain then rampant in the British and German Empires. The former testifies to the "good," difference-and-distinction-grounded cosmopolitanism, the latter, to the "bad" sort, which is, as far as Margaret is concerned, the one that unfortunately carries the day. If, generally speaking, her attempts fall short, in her family and outside it, that is not only because her project and its historical context are at odds but also because this project remains too "Schlegelian," too idealistic. As a result, the sodalities and solidarities she seeks in lieu of absolute distinctiveness and complete sameness do not achieve their end. Responding to this failure, or quasi-failure, of Forster's cosmopolitan designs, Smith employs the Haitian painting—an actual artwork, she specifies—as a more credible, more palpable, and hence more productive "bonding" device (Smith, *On Beauty* "Author's Note" 445).

Paul Gilroy has warned about the shortcomings of those bonds and alliances predicated on and thus limited by a "raciological" understanding of communal interaction and political effectiveness. "The spaces in which 'races' come to life," he maintains, "are a field from which political interaction has been banished. It is usually replaced by enthusiasm for the cheapest pseudo-solidarities: forms of connection that are imagined to arise effortlessly from shared phenotypes, culture, and bio-nationalities." The "glamour of sameness" stemming from the latter is certainly deceiving (41). Controversial as this position has been, it helps us explain what happens between Carlene, a Caribbean-British woman, and Kiki, her African American friend, and more broadly with what occurs intertextually "between" *Howards End* and *On Beauty*. Simply put, what the Haitian canvas offers the two black women is a more tangible, affective-aesthetic space in which, and in response to which, they connect across their all-too-conspicuous differences. This ability to connect does not annul race. But this bond lends race an emotional substance that proves more palpable, more immediate than anything else the two women of African background might have in common. Quite simply, what Smith is after is a more nuanced form of sharing. This form does not preexist, for it is rooted in putative racist-genomic sameness. It implies, however, a state of being with an other that the self and other work toward rather than take for granted. Carlene has developed her own relation to the painting while Kiki has hardly one at the beginning of their relationship, but, following her son's "liberating" the painting from Monty's Wellington office, she begins to respond to the art object and through it to its previous owner. In turn, she engages her estranged husband's own aesthetic dealings and thus marks a fresh start in their own relationship.

Beauty, Milan Kundera notes in a commentary on Kafka, is "perpetual astonishment." It shocks us because it is essentially the "beauty of strangeness" (50–51). In this sense, Howard Belsey is not off the mark: in beautiful objects, we are intrigued by the unfamiliar and the non-familial, by what differs from us and our kin, from what we normally do, know, and surround ourselves with. We tend to like what surprises us. Difference can be forbidding, hard to fathom or put together conceptually. It is wholly different, that is, another name for the Schlegelian chaos and fragment. What is different in the object we gaze at attracts us. Aesthetics, or, as Kundera calls it, "poetics," is cosmopolitan. The truly remarkable thing, though, is that, as Elaine Scarry argues in the book that made such a powerful impact on Smith, we react to objects mimetically no matter how bizarre and strange they appear to us. "[B]eautiful things," Scarry contends, "always carry greetings from other worlds with them" (47). But often our impulse is to try and replicate their beauty, to "follow" them no matter how otherworldly their call. This response provides both a fitting reaction aesthetically and ethically. For, the internal equilibrium and the formal achievement we appreciate in the beautiful and the fair outshine "loveliness of aspect." They reach across the boundaries of the admired object and flood the extra-aesthetical, the social, and the interpersonal. They even hint at ways of making sociality itself beautiful by suggesting that the "fairness" and balance of proportions we notice in art must convert into a "symmetry of everyone's relation to one another" outside it. Art becomes then hard to delimitate. Once art has issued its "invitation to ethical fairness" (95), its ethics and aesthetics overlap. Both within and

without beautiful things, beauty ought to reign supreme and so spill over, outside museums and libraries, where most of us still place it, into sites "symmetrically"—"aesthetically"—occupied by "me" and "you," "my" kind and "yours." Thus underwritten by an aesthetic, "differential" cosmopolitanism, social space at long last becomes, in Smith's view, a domain where self and other come together by virtue rather than at the expense of their individualizing marks. Notes

1. On Smith and Forster's "Only connect ..." see Garrett and Caldwell.
2. Brennan 136–37. Brennan ranks twentieth-century cosmopolitan proponents with others "champions" of globalization. For Rowe, see his article "Post-Nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies," in Rowe, *Post-Nationalist American Studies* 31.
3. For a brief discussion of the Buddhist tradition of cosmopolitanism reaching back to 500 BB, see Dharwadker's essay "Cosmopolitanism in Its Time and Place," an introduction to his anthology, *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture* 6–7.
4. On "micro-cosmopolitanism," see Cronin 15.
5. Jacobowitz. In a footnote to his *Howards End* edition, Alistair M. Duckworth also observes that "The Name *Schlegel* recalls the Schlegel brothers" (Forster 25).
6. The critic quotes from *The Manuscripts of Howards End* edited by Oliver Stallybrass. He also thinks that "there is no way to tell whether Forster had in mind Friedrich Schlegel or August Wilhelm Schlegel as the 'great critic'" (205). As my reading suggests, in all likelihood, Friedrich is the one Forster refers to even though "August Wilhelm may have had greater importance in Forster's day" (205).
7. My translation of the following French original: "Mais l'enfer, c'est les autres' a toujours été mal compris. On a cru que je voulais dire par là que nos rapports avec les autres étaient toujours empoisonnés, que c'étaient toujours des rapports infernaux. Or, c'est autre chose que je veux dire. Je veux dire que si les rapports avec autrui sont tordus, viciés, alors l'autre ne peut être que l'enfer. Pourquoi? Parce que les autres sont au fond ce qu'il y a de plus important en nous-même pour notre propre connaissance de nous-même. Quand nous pensons sur nous, quand nous essayons de nous connaître, au fond nous usons ces connaissances que les autres ont déjà sur nous. Nous jugeons avec les moyens que les autres ont, nous ont donné de nous juger. Quoique je dise sur moi, toujours le jugement d'autrui entre dedans. Ce qui veut dire que, si mes rapports sont mauvaises, je me mets dans la totale dépendance d'autrui. Et alors en effet je suis en enfer" (Jean-Paul Sartre, "*Huis clos* de Jean-Paul Sartre").

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