

**Only Connect?: Aspects of Intertextuality in Zadie Smith's  
*On Beauty***

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## 1. Introduction

*Howard looked back at the woman on the wall, Rembrandt's love, Hendrickje. Though her hands were imprecise blurs, paint heaped on paint and roiled with the brush, the rest of her skin had been expertly rendered in all its variety – chalky whites and lively pinks, the underlying blue of her veins and the ever present human hint of yellow, intimation of what is to come.*

(Smith, *On Beauty*, 443)

Words heaped on words, Zadie Smith's prolific brushstrokes easily evoke the beauty of Rembrandt, of art and of life in general – but not without a satirical tinge. The slightly ridiculous characters of her third novel *On Beauty* (2005) have convinced one reviewer that in Smith's literary world "people rot from the inside" (Watman 59) as the "human hint of yellow" slowly drifts to the surface. Indeed, in her novel Smith presents us with a cavalcade of human failures: broken marriages, dysfunctional families, disadvantaged students and befuddled professors. Yet beneath the transatlantic satire of campus life that is *On Beauty* there persist the question posed by the novel's title: how does beauty fare in a world where even art historians are blind to its subtleties? Not well, it would seem, judged by the inability of one of the novel's central characters, Rembrandt critic Howard Belsey, to attend to what is beautiful in his life. Zadie Smith, however, never for a moment forgets to attend to her characters, but renders the "chalky whites and lively pinks" of the two main families whose interactions form the basis of the novel with artistic gusto. Through the Belseys and Kippses's ideological and academic feuds Smith enters into a literary dialogue with Rembrandt, art, beauty and the source of her inspiration, E. M. Forster.

After its publication Smith's *On Beauty* received mixed reviews. While many reviewers praised its "keen sense of the human condition" (Warikoo 469), some were more doubtful of the ability of its "simple schematic disdain" (Alter 30) to depict the variegated

spheres of life. What few critics failed to mention, however, was Smith's self-proclaimed debt to E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910). Indeed, *On Beauty* follows the contours of Forster's Edwardian class battle between the liberal Schlegels and the conservative Wilcox family from the beginning's hapless love affair to the impetuous legacy left by one woman to another with recurring accuracy. Yet the outward similarities between the novels have led some reviewers simply to reduce Smith's work to an updating of Forster's modern classic, and not always with attractive results. According to Gray (49), "[Smith's] noisy forwardness will remind no one of E. M. Forster", whereas other, more moderate reviewers allude to the "nabbed [...] scenes" and "motifs lifted from *Howards End*" (Watman 59), which make *On Beauty* appear as little more than stolen goods. Certainly Smith uses the Edwardian novelist as scaffolding to help construct her own fiction, but too reductive a contrast between the novels can fail to take into consideration the larger framework of each work.

As can be seen from the critical discussion on *On Beauty*, Smith's debt to Forster has also engendered some comment on the intertextual relationship between the two novels. Where Gemma Lopez summarises the main similarities between the narratives of *Howards End* and *On Beauty*, Susan Fischer acknowledges the importance of intertextual allusions for the interpretation of Smith's novel. Nevertheless, for many reviewers and critics alike, intertextuality remains merely a fashionable byword that rarely excites much elaboration. Despite the generous number of pages dedicated to mapping the overt intertextual links regarding plot and characters, not enough attention has been paid to the inherent problems of applying as opaque a term as intertextuality to the study of influences and allusions. For every quotation and reference found in Smith's work to be slumped under the general term intertextuality not only oversimplifies the concept but also threatens to homogenise the complexity of the whole theoretical field. While

Smith's use of Forster's *Howards End* certainly yields to an intertextual study, it is also worth noting, as Fischer does, the relevance for interpretation of the various explicit and implicit similarities as well as differences between the two novels. In addition, I consider that it is useful to move beyond the level of allusion and explore the underlying assumptions of a more theoretical, poststructuralist notion of intertextuality *On Beauty* also engages with.

Apart from intertextuality, two other aspects of the novel have drawn attention from reviewers as well as critics. A theme that also governed Smith's first novel *White Teeth* (2000), multiculturalism and contemporary life in multicultural societies proved a touchstone for several reviews also at the time of the publication of *On Beauty*. Another aspect which I will concentrate more on is the role beauty plays in the novel. Indeed, several critics have made a note of the importance of aesthetics prefigured by the novel's title. Kathleen Wall argues that the intricate relationship between art and ethics in *On Beauty* demonstrates the importance of intersubjective experience, while Lopez concentrates on examining the novel's representation of the contradictions apparent in academia's inability to enjoy the beauty it claims to study. Wall's notions on the redeeming qualities of beauty prove particularly useful in discussing Rembrandt's role in Smith's novel and how it illustrates the characters' reactions towards the painter. In my study, I will examine the role of beauty in the novel as a part of a discussion on textual multivalency and the importance of interpretation in engaging with art, which will hopefully give a better understanding of the notions of art Smith privileges in her novel and add to the discussion of deconstruction and postmodernism.

While I touch upon several subjects in the course of my study, my primary focus will be on aspects of intertextuality in Smith's *On Beauty*. I shall argue that while the explicit relationship between *On Beauty* and *Howards End* yields to a more structuralist notion of

intertextuality as “palimpsestuous” rewriting, Smith nevertheless demonstrates an awareness of a more complex, post-structuralist view of intertextuality illustrated in *On Beauty* through the world of academic discourse and responses to Rembrandt’s paintings. Chapter 2 will explore a more traditional concept of intertextuality in the light of Gérard Genette’s study *Palimpsests* (1982) and demonstrate how *On Beauty* functions as a modern rewriting of *Howards End* in terms of its structure, diegesis and themes. Chapter 3 on the other hand will attempt to interrogate the poststructuralist debate on intertextuality by examining Roland Barthes’s essay “The Death of Author” (1967) and the impact it has had on postmodern literary theory as well as illustrating the way in which Smith engages with the debate through the representation of various types of readers and their struggle with textual multivalency. By concentrating on two different, even antithetical theories of intertextuality, I hope to demonstrate the diversity as well as the contradictions apparent in the field, while showing the validity and adaptability of different intertextual approaches to contemporary literature.

### **1.1 Background and methodology**

Before we move onto a more detailed analysis of Smith’s *On Beauty*, it will be useful to further discuss some of the methodology relevant to this study. One of the reasons why E. M. Forster’s fiction provides such a tempting point of departure for a discussion of Smith’s work can be found in her acknowledgements where she openly draws attention to the debt she owes to the Edwardian novelist. Other sources Smith cites as her inspiration are Simon Schama’s book *Rembrandt’s Eyes* (1999) and Elaine Scarry’s essay *On Beauty and Being Just*<sup>1</sup> (1999) from which Smith has borrowed her title, a heading for the novel’s final chapter and “a good deal of inspiration” (Smith, acknowledgements). While Smith’s acknowledgement of Schama’s study of

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<sup>1</sup> Scarry’s work originated in the Tanner Lectures on Human Values delivered at Yale University in 1998.

the Dutch painter alerts us to the centrality of Rembrandt in *On Beauty*, Scarry's defence of aesthetic beauty in turn leads us to consider the thematic importance beauty has in Smith's novel. As it were, Smith is serving us a good selection of subjects to choose from. Even though to dismiss her influences altogether would simply be foolish, I am aware that for an intertextual study to centre on the author's inspiration might seem somewhat problematic. The nature of the approach may seem particularly paradoxical in light of chapter 3 which will discuss the tendency of much intertextual theory to dismiss the author's intentions and authority over texts. Therefore my approach will benefit from some clarification.

In order to be aware of the complexity of the intertextual field of study, we must first address its diversity. Ever since the term intertextuality first appeared in the 1960s in the wake of poststructuralism and Saussurean linguistics, its exact definition has been difficult to pin down, partly because of its easy applicability and partly because of the ever-growing number of theorists participating in the field (Allen 2-3). In general terms, by modern theorists intertextuality is understood to mean the way in which all written and spoken texts always refer to other texts, since words and structures pre-exist any individual speaker or writer (Wolfreys 119). Thus, no text can exist independent of the framework of textual relations necessitated by the systems, codes and traditions that produce works of literature. Since the writer is also a reader of texts, it is therefore inevitable that their work is littered with influences of every kind, just as each reader brings a unique knowledge of texts into any given reading. Also, intertextuality, according to Wolfreys (119), can take place consciously when an author knowingly refers to another work, but in another sense intertextuality also takes place in all words and utterances all the time since meaning is not tied to any single word. As this dichotomy clearly suggests, intertextuality lends itself to the study of influence and poststructuralist notions

of discourse alike. Such a loose definition may at first frustrate the attempts of anyone who wishes for a clear-cut set of literary tools to aid their analysis, but, as Graham Allen (2) notes, on the other hand it also puts intertextuality in danger of meaning little more than what each individual critic wants it to mean. Thus, in most cases some discussion of the complexities of the field is needed in order to avoid unnecessarily oblique applications of the term.

What makes intertextuality a particularly valuable concept regarding *On Beauty* is the way in which it helps to open different levels of the novel for inspection. While all the above may shed doubt on the usefulness of intertextuality as a concept, my study will nevertheless aim at demonstrating its theoretical relevance by looking at two of its proponents, Gérard Genette and Roland Barthes, and how their notions not only make us understand the thematic importance of textual relations in Smith's novel but also reveal Smith's own debt to intertextual theory and the way it has permeated postmodern thinking. Chronologically speaking, Barthes's ideas precede those of Genette's, but since Genette presents a distinctly structuralist rendition of intertextuality which adheres more to the theoretical concepts that were prevalent before their rejection by poststructuralism, his work *Palimpsests* will be discussed in the first part of the study. Ideologically closer to the birth of intertextuality, Barthes's "The Death of the Author" will be introduced in the third chapter of the study as a part of a more in depth exploration of intertextuality reflected by the modern use of the term. Thus, through Genette we are able to explore the concrete instances of intertextual play which form the surface of the palimpsest Smith is writing on, while Barthes moves beyond influences and allusions and instead sheds light on the construction of meaning in textual networks. Therefore by first considering Smith's sources we are identifying the importance of intertextuality as a subject, which paves way for a further exploration of the effects of different types of intertextuality on interpretation.



As we discuss the application of the critical stances intertextuality has engendered it will become clear that it is a term that is not exclusive to literature or written language, which is why it is worth making a note on the terminology used in this study. In discussing Smith's debt to Forster's *Howards End*, it is clear we are examining two written literary works which comfortably exist between two covers on the shelves of libraries and bookshops. This is reflected in the reasonably unequivocal terminology borrowed from Genette in chapter 2 which encompasses forms of *textuality* as they appear in written texts; the focus of Genette's study is clearly on individual works as material objects, in other words, books. Where we run into the possibility of adapting intertextuality to non-literary art forms is in chapter 3 which focuses on Rembrandt's paintings as intertexts in Smith's novel. As such, intertextuality has long since been naturalised by critics of painting, music and architecture and therefore its interdisciplinary use should not in itself pose problems (Allen 5). However, in discussing Barthes's ideas I found it useful to explore the nature and meaning of the "text", since it has a central role in Barthes's understanding of how meaning is produced. To Barthes, rather than the work which can be held in the hand, the text is something that can only be experienced in an "activity of production" by the reader (157). Such a broad definition helps us also extend some of Barthes's concepts to cover non-literary representation, as in the case of Rembrandt.

Despite presenting Barthes's terms author, reader and text as they are used in his critical writings, I will also utilise the terms painter, viewer and painting while discussing the representation of art in *On Beauty*. However, while Barthes's theoretical focus was undoubtedly on written and spoken language, in the frame of my study the term author and painter are used more or less interchangeably, as is painting and text as well as viewer and reader. Chapter 3 includes a short discussion of the appropriateness and fluidity of the terminology that covers both

literature and painting, since understanding both relies on processes of interpretation and, for want of a better word, reading (see e.g. Bal 9). The move from author to painter and from text to painting is a relatively simple one to make. The painter occupies the same position as the author as a creator to whom works are attributed; Rembrandt for example is an author of images just as Smith is an artist with language. Despite the differences in modality, texts and images in their turn converge on the reader or viewer, presenting similar networks of meaning that yield to various types of readings.<sup>2</sup> Therefore using the terms interchangeably should not be too confusing, though naturally it is worth keeping in mind that the visual and literary arts are by no means identical and each produces meanings in slightly different ways. The function of non-literary arts in relation to literary ones, however, remains beyond the scope of this study.

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the word/image opposition, see Bal (1991).

## 2. The structuralist intertext: E. M. Forster's *Howards End*

### 2.1 Palimpsests

As we discussed in the introduction, it is Smith herself who alerts us to the fact that her novel *On Beauty*<sup>3</sup> owes a debt to Forster's *Howards End*<sup>4</sup>: "It should be obvious from the first line that this is a novel inspired by a love of E. M. Forster" (Smith, acknowledgements). While such open avowal leaves little room for doubt about the intertextual relationship between the novels, tracing the forms Smith's "inspiration" takes requires more than just the author's acknowledgement. A more detailed comparison can help us identify several elements from *HE* merged and embedded in the fabric of Smith's novel which a reader unacquainted with Forster may not even suspect are there. These elements range from single sentences and names of characters to larger thematic overlaps which not only link but also separate the two novels. Identification and analysis of the explicit as well as implicit intertextual links will give us a better understanding of how Smith employs Forster's *HE* as well as what effect that has on the interpretation of the two novels. Thus, this chapter will introduce Genette's *Palimpsests* in an attempt to demonstrate the dependence of *OB* on *HE* and illustrate the thematic relevance of intertextual rewriting.

By drawing attention to the first line of *OB*, Smith identifies with the work of E. M. Forster and in particular invites explicit comparison with *HE*. Tracing this initial connection between the novels becomes an act of recognition which foregrounds the identification of the larger structures shared by the two novels. The opening line of *HE* is simple enough: "One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister" (*HE*, 3). Smith's version of the line, though adding a modern spin to it, is recognizably that of Forster: "One may as well begin with Jerome's e-mails to his father" (*OB*, 3). What follows is a series of e-mails culminating in Jerome, the

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<sup>3</sup> referred to as *OB*

<sup>4</sup> referred to as *HE*

oldest son of Howard Belsey, confessing he is in love with the daughter of his father's academic rival. In a parallel episode in *HE*, Helen Schlegel writes to her sister Margaret only to abruptly inform her of having fallen in love with the youngest son of the conservative Wilcox family. As the novels progress, not only does it become evident for the reader that parallels like these govern the structure of Smith's *OB* but also that *HE* acts as a vital intertext through which new aspects can be introduced to the understanding of Smith's novel.

While the identification of intertexts in itself might be regarded as an act of interpretation (Allen 3), those elements which are often perceived as "outside" the text in question yet which direct and control its interpretation are also a part of the same process. For instance, Smith's confession of her love of Forster in her acknowledgements is an example of the author directing the reader's attention towards an earlier work which, despite Forster's success, might not be known to the contemporary reader. In Gérard Genette's (3) terms, this is an illustration of what he regards as paratextuality which comprises all the secondary signals to a text such as titles, prefaces, covers, illustrations, notes etc. and which in Smith's case is clearly autographic, that is, provided by the author herself. Thus paratextual elements assist in establishing the text's nature as well as its intentions by intimating how it should be read (Allen 104). Just as Smith guides the reader towards E. M. Forster, so the beginning of her novel guides the identification and further study of relevant intertextual links between the two writers. Despite the frequent dismissals of authorial agency in the field of intertextual studies (see e.g. Orr 60), such simple paratextual markers as acknowledgements can still serve as a valuable starting point for further analysis.

In addition to paratextuality, Genette provides us with several other concepts useful in exploring the relations between two texts. His structuralist work *Palimpsests* opens up some of

the basic ways in which texts reread and rewrite one another and offers an inventory of intertextual practices which can, though naturally with some reservations, help examine and explain some of the strategies Smith employs in *OB*. Renaming Kristeva's term intertextuality as transtextuality, Genette defines it as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (1). While transtextuality corresponds to what most critics understand by intertextuality, this redefinition of terms allows Genette to categorise different *types* of transtextuality relevant to his study. Hypertextuality, the main subject of *Palimpsests* and the type of transtextuality perhaps most readily applicable to Smith's novel, is described as "any relationship uniting a text B [...] to an earlier text A [...], upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (Genette 5). Text B, then, is termed the hypertext and text A the hypotext (ibid.). In the large number of varied relationships uniting the hypertext and hypotext there are specific practices which provide us with a framework for examining settings, locations and themes which are all pertinent to the discussion of Smith's work and which in particular demonstrate the changes and transformations made to Forster's novel. In fact, rather than producing a simple template for listing convergent elements in the novels, Genette's study of transformation offers particularly useful notions which exemplify the role and effect produced by changes to the hypotext.

According to Genette, of all hypertextual practices, transformation, or transposition, is the most important since it calls upon a large scope and variety of procedures (212). Transposition is also significant because it allows for textual amplitude and ideological ambition which may produce works of huge dimensions or even entirely conceal a work's hypertextual character (Genette 213). It is clear that Genette refrains from attempting any taxonomic classification of transpositional practices which provides leeway for his analysis since

each work combines the basic procedures of transformation in its own way. What is most important to note, however, is the fact that each transposition has always at least some impact on the meaning of the transformed hypotext (Genette 294). Thus if a hypertext augments, subtracts and replaces elements in its hypotext it necessarily results in a modification of meaning. Providing a cogent picture of some of the changes that can be made to a hypotext, thematic, or semantic, transpositions are the most useful since they bear on the very significance of the hypotext (ibid.). Significant operations linked with semantic transformation are diegetic transposition, a change in the diegesis, and pragmatic transposition, a modification of the events and actions in the plot (ibid.). Despite the distinction between them, it is necessary to note that they rarely occur in isolation or in any pure form but rather complement each other. It is also worth noting that Genette distinguishes between diegesis and action. In his study, diegesis is defined as the “spatiotemporal world designated by the narrative” whereas action falls within the field of pragmatic changes (295).

Diegetic transpositions touch on the diegetic framework of a text since they affect the time, place, and setting of a particular work. As Genette explains, their function is a movement of proximization which brings the hypotext more up to date and closer to its own audience in temporal, geographic and social terms (304). Major changes in place, time and setting at times make it impossible to preserve more than the bare outlines of the plot which, as we shall see, seems to be the case with *OB*. Pragmatic transposition, on the other hand, is often integral to diegetic and semantic operations resulting either from a transposition in the diegesis or employed in order to transform the message of the hypotext (Genette 312). Whether changing merely the setting or the whole meaning of a hypotext, transpositions reflect a change in the reader as well as a change in society and it is precisely for that reason they are essential to a

hypertextual rewriting. However, even though Genette's examples help in identifying transpositional practices, it is worth noting that his study concentrates mainly on French and classical literature, with the exception of single famous works from other major literatures. There is also a clear emphasis on explicit rewritings of classical texts which no doubt provide ample opportunities for analysis but which leave little room for looking at modern fiction within the scope of Genette's study. Therefore examining Smith in light of Genette's "palimpsestuous" readings will offer an insight into a more traditional concept of intertextuality as well as exemplify the extent to which structuralist notions can be applied to contemporary literature.

### **2.1.1 Similarities in structure**

One of the most distinguishable features *OB* shares with *HE* is the way in which the story centres on two opposing families who despite their differences, or even because of them, become intertwined in various ways through a series of seemingly chance events. By introducing certain scenes from *HE* into her story, Smith underlines the thematic as well as structural significance of the similarities shared by parallel passages in the novels. By comparing the novels, we can see that most of these parallel scenes in Smith's novel are a very close imitation of Forster and concentrate particularly on the ways in which characters become connected and disconnected throughout the course of the narrative. Thus, while identifying the parallels between the two families in Smith and Forster's novels relies to an extent on the recognition of certain events and scenes which form the core structure of *OB*, this comparison also gives rise to some of the most central themes that are carried across from *HE*. Indeed, it would seem that bridging, fusing and questioning the dichotomous relationship between different views, beliefs and personal relations is as relevant a theme today as it was in Forster's time.

In order to understand how the events of *HE* are transformed into those of *OB*, we need to look at the specific instances of overlap found in the novels. In *OB*, laid from beginning to end at regular intervals is a set of sequences that are similar to and follow the same order as those in *HE*. These scenes range from the beginning's brief engagement between members of the two respective families to the bequeathal of a valuable legacy by a dying woman unbeknownst to her family. Importantly, it is the actions of the characters and how they serve to illustrate the central themes that unite the two novels rather than any straightforward correspondence between one character and the next.

A particularly significant sequence Smith borrows from Forster is the way in which the main female characters of the two opposing families bring the families closer together by forming a tentative friendship. A specific chapter illustrative of the manner and extent to which *HE* figures in *OB* is set around an intended visit to a country house. In *HE*, Margaret Schlegel's acquaintance with Ruth Wilcox, wife of Henry Wilcox, leads to a shopping spree for Christmas presents which is followed by an invitation to spend a night at the Wilcox country house Howards End. Correspondingly, in *OB*, Kiki Belsey and Carlene Kipps's shopping trip culminates in an invitation to Amherst which Kiki, like Margaret, first refuses only to rush off to the train station at the last minute in the hope of catching up with her host. Both chapters begin with strikingly similar reflections on the puzzling characters of the older women. Margaret muses on Mrs Wilcox: "Was Mrs Wilcox one of the unsatisfactory people – there are many of them – who dangle intimacy and then withdraw it?" (*HE*, 67). The same tone is struck when it comes to Mrs Kipps: "Was Carlene Kipps one of these women who promises friendship but never truly delivers it? A friendship flirt?" (*OB*, 264). The degree of similarity between the



excerpts invites the juxtaposition of the characters of Mrs Wilcox and Carlene Kipps as well as emphasising the following events and how they fit into the same pattern as those in *HE*.

The rest of the chapter in both novels follows Margaret and Mrs Wilcox and Kiki and Carlene on their shopping tour and abortive visit to the country. While the following pages offer less precise similarities than the above excerpt, the subsequent scenes are nevertheless played out with recognisable correspondence to the very end of the chapter. At the end, the intended country visit is foiled by the arrival of the older woman's family. Smith, although more concise, follows Forster's example:

They began to walk up the long platform. Far at its end stood the train, breasting the darkness without. They never reached it. Before imagination could triumph, there were cries of 'Mother! Mother!' and a heavy-browed girl darted out of the cloakroom and seized Mrs Wilcox by the arm. (*HE*, 74)

They were just walking arm in arm up the platform when they heard Carlene's name cried out several times: 'Mum! Hey, Mum!' (*OB*, 270)

As can be seen, although Forster's version is clearly more elaborate, Smith nevertheless crafts hers with precise regard to detail. "Mother" becomes "Mum" and the gentle narration peculiar to Forster is swept away by Smith's pithy equivalent, yet the scene is essentially the same. Step by step Smith adapts events and actions of characters to lay out certain sections of her novel in imitation of *HE*. Of course, this is only a part of the novel: while *HE* moves in and out of view, appearing and reappearing sometimes when you least expect it to, most of Smith's work is far from simply following the structure of Forster's novel.

As the juxtaposition of Mrs Wilcox and Carlene Kipps already suggested, several of the main characters in *OB* also have loose counterparts in *HE*. These connections between characters serve the double function of simultaneously bridging the two novels as well as alerting the reader to the differences between them through the substantial changes Smith has

made to Forster's hypotext. In fact, most of the characters can only be recognised through similar situations. For instance, Carl, a young black rap artist in *OB*, can be equated with the unfortunate clerk Leonard Bast standing at the "extreme verge of gentility" (*HE*, 38) insofar as they both belong to a less well-to-do class and are forced to subject themselves to help and advice from those in a better position. Carl, like Leonard, meets his benefactors in a classical concert, Mozart as opposed to Forster's Beethoven, after having his CD-player stolen by Zora: Carl's discman, like Leonard's famous stolen umbrella in *HE*, introduces him to a world inhabited by people of privilege and education. Carl, who "more and more these days [...] found himself listening to people talk, wanting to add something" (*OB*, 72) is nevertheless different from Leonard who, while listening to Margaret, thinks that "if only he could talk like this, he would have caught the world" (*HE*, 34). Although both characters wish to join in, it is Leonard with his awed reverence for culture who is reaching towards the Schlegels through the accepted middle-class norms while Carl who "get[s] [his] culture where [he] can" (*OB*, 76) has found his own medium with which to communicate. Both the idea of culture as well as the cultural manifestations of the so-called lower classes is much more varied in Smith's novel, which both reflects the process of proximization as well as the distancing of Smith's novel from its hypotext. That Smith has added race to these issues of class, education and culture also leads us to the major thematic changes between the novels which shall be discussed further on.

Although the respective characters are united by a more general framework of similar actions and situations, it is interesting to note that one of the main characters in *OB*, Howard Belsey, seems to find no ready equivalent in *HE*. If anything, his treatment distances him from Forster's novel by emphasising his inability to connect with others. Whereas Kiki's friendship with Carlene follows the same path as Margaret's with Mrs Wilcox, Carl occupies the

same socio-economic position as Leonard and is introduced in the same way and the children of the two families entangle themselves romantically in a similar manner, one of the few explicit links between Howard Belsey and Forster's novel seems to be his name. With a sly allusion to the author of the hypotext, Smith's confused academic is in fact made to openly disparage Forster. Visiting his father in London, Howard picks up a book and looks at its spine: "*A Room with a View*. Forster.' Howard smiled sadly. 'Can't stand Forster. Enjoying it?'" (*OB*, 298). The book, it turns out, belongs to a Christian lady who helps around the house. Smith's ironic treatment of Howard's literary tastes appears to serve as a counterpoint to the theme of connection as well as to underline his shortcomings with his wife and family. It is not that Howard is represented as entirely anti-Forster as his opinion might suggest, but that his inability and refusal to understand and accept set him apart from the other characters and place him outside the Forsterian creed of "only connect", the famous epigraph to *HE*. The long overdue visit to his father merely ends in a quarrel as Howard bolts off, angry and bitter, leaving his father alone in front of the TV. He does not believe, like his father does, "that time is how you spend your love" (*OB*, 302). In fact, if we construe the name of Forster's novel to mean Howard's end, an ironic emphasis is added to Howard's various failures: the end of the novel pictures the unfaithful husband and blundering father in a desperate attempt to save his career with a lecture on Rembrandt. But Howard has forgotten his notes and continues flicking through his power point presentation in silence as his estranged wife Kiki stares at him from the audience. His defeat, his "end", would seem final if it was not for the promise of a deferred reunion with his wife: "[Howard] looked out into the audience once more and saw Kiki only. He smiled at her. She smiled. She looked away, but she smiled" (*OB*, 443).

### 2.1.2 Changes in diegesis

As we have explored some of the scenes and characters from *HE* Smith employs in her novel, we will now turn our attention in particular to the transformations of time and place in *OB*. Not only is the scope of Smith's book larger than that of *HE*, the setting and locations have also been significantly altered. Set in Edwardian England, *HE* shuttles between the town and country as the characters try to negotiate their lives alternately either in London or one of the Wilcox country houses, now Oniton, now Howards End. In the era of motor cars and industrialization, it is the house in the country, Howards End, which comes to represent the hope for harmony as London spreads its grey business-like suburbs towards the green hills and meadows. On a visit to Howards End, Margaret meditates on the surroundings:

In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect – connect without bitterness until all men are brothers. (*HE*, 229)

Life in the country appears natural, following the same cycle as nature with the passing of years and the eternal rebirth of spring. It also holds the promise of equality when “all men are brothers.” This view clearly idealises the country and looks back on a tradition of rural life as a noble, untroubled way of living offering a ready solution to the problem of inequality. Indeed, as Delany has noted, Forster's pastoralism hopes to serve as an alternative to modernity and an indictment of the imperial Wilcox way of life (290).

In comparison, Smith's *OB* is to a large extent set in Wellington, a fictional university town in contemporary New England. Recalling Genette, the spatial, not to mention temporal, transfer of the major action in Smith's novel from England to America is a typical transpositional practice distancing *OB* from *HE* and bringing it into closer proximity with a contemporary audience (213). Although the change of location from one continent to another

creates a contemporary setting for Smith to work with, it also allows for a crucial comparison between new and old, modernity and history. Bearing that in mind, it is particularly interesting to examine the sections of Smith's novel which, like *HE*, are set in London. If the opposition in *HE* is between the town and country, *OB* in turn constructs a similar tension between London and Wellington, or more specifically between Britain and America. London is the home of the conservative West Indian Kipps family and former home of Howard, a dedicated Marxist, who has escaped to the United States. Monty Kipps's support for anti-affirmative action and strong religious beliefs fall in line with ideas of antiquated tradition, whereas his conservative beliefs prove disruptive when introduced into Wellington campus politics during his stay there. In Howard's case, the visit to the Kippses in London he is forced to make only elicits a rant about the city's architecture: "Everywhere cramped rows of Victorian terraces, the maiden aunts of English architecture, the culture museums of bourgeois Victoriana" (*OB*, 34). The world he has escaped is crowded and middle-class with "culture museums" hosting obsolete relics of an earlier age. The shift of focus, seen through Howard's eyes, from tradition-bound Britain towards melting pot or rather, salad bowl America favours the new and modern over the old and traditional, which is a thematic transposition of the dichotomy between the town and country in *HE* where in turn it is the pastoral countryside which holds greater hope despite modern interventions.

Another illustrative transposition of the same set of values is present in Howard's conversation with his father. A retired butcher, Howard's father represents everything Howard believes he has escaped from. His father's profession, way of life and racist views appear as the reverse of the same coin of prejudice and backward-looking intolerance which Monty Kipps's politico-religious fervour seems to stand for. Howard, on a brief visit to his father's house in

London, ends up confessing his marriage of thirty years with his African-American wife Kiki is falling apart. Of course, what Howard neglects to mention is his affair with a colleague.

Howard's father, without much thought, jumps to his own conclusion: "She found a black fella, I spose. It was always going to happen, though. It's in their nature'" (*OB*, 301). Such blunt racism reduces Kiki along with every other black person into the collective, dehumanised "they" whose "nature", according to traditional orientalist representations, is promiscuous and governed by lust and thereby threatening to white society (Young, *Colonial* 5, 9, 97). Howard's father's stereotypical outlook reiterates the impression of embarrassingly outmoded thinking and equates his British background and values with a society staring firmly back into the past while America struggles for a better future.<sup>5</sup> Despite the Kipps family being black, Monty's conservative views are still able to exist parallel to those of Harold's father in a society constructed on rigid socio-economic divisions.

## **2.2 Thematic transformations**

Criticism on E. M. Forster's *Howards End* has, ever since its publication, grown to considerable proportions. Treating the novel's motto "Only connect..." as a point of departure, for several critics the novel offers a thematic resolution and a celebration of liberal values over money-making conservatism (Trilling, Beer, Crews), while others have found the proposed resolutions more ambivalent and treated the apparent failure to reconcile divergent sensibilities as a reinforcement of existing dichotomies (White, Delany). Some have gone so far as to debunk the idea of connection altogether. "Forster does not really want connection at all, but only the rewards of connection," Wilfred Stone asserted over 40 years ago (266). Whatever the view on

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<sup>5</sup> This backward-looking tendency in postcolonial societies like Britain has been investigated in two key texts: Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2006) and Dennis Walder's *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Memory and Representations* (2010).

the novel's proposed resolution, there is critical consensus on the thematic importance of the binary oppositions between the novel's representations of class and society, liberalism and conservatism and the spheres of personal and public life. Thus the themes of class, society, politics and personal relationships raised by Forster's condition-of-England novel which have fuelled critical discussion for decades also pave way for a discussion on the thematic overlaps in Smith's contemporary novel. By exploring the thematic equivalents of Forster's contending forces of liberalism and conservatism, class and society, personal and public in Smith's *On Beauty*, we are led to the significant thematic transformations which separate the two novels and reflect the changes imprinted by the century stretching between them.

### **2.2.1 Class and the economics of inequality**

In *HE*, questions of class and status are illustrated most forcibly through the character of Leonard Bast, whose representation demonstrates the heightened sense of inequality and problematic position of the lower classes in the civilising process. When comparing the lower middle-class clerk with the liberal Schlegels, "leisured women, who [have] been reading steadily from childhood" (*HE*, 34) and who live on a private income, it becomes clear that the opportunities for education and culture are determined by financial means. Thus Leonard's low status in society is seen as a direct consequence of his lack of wealth:

He knew that he was poor, and would admit it; he would have died sooner than confess any inferiority to the rich. This may be splendid of him. But he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as lovable. His mind and his body had been alike underfed, because he was poor, and because he was modern they were always craving for better food. (*HE*, 38-39)

Inferiority, then, stems from a lack of necessities. Yet, as Hoy points out, there is a sense of irony in Leonard's position: he is inferior in the practical sense but superior in being sharply aware of

class distinctions in a society which both victimizes the lower classes and tempts them to climb the economic as well as cultural ladder (228). That his mind and body are “always craving for better food” testifies both to the lower classes’ insufficient material conditions as well as the inability of those conditions to provide and sustain the education and middle-class culture they are tempted to aim at. Importantly, it is not Leonard who is the object of criticism in the passage as some critics have claimed (cf. Savage, Summers), but his position and the dominating power structures responsible for it.

*OB* constructs a similar setting in which an individual’s status in society is largely dependent on economic means. Yet differing from *HE*, in *OB* class distinctions are more a primary consequence of education rather than an accident of birth. Furthermore, although Smith makes the distinction between economic classes, unlike Forster, she does not situate class distinctions in hierarchical modes of culture or pronounced physical attributes. Despite the fact that his main focus is on the motivation of characters, Genette’s idea of motivation might in this case serve a useful tool for understanding the change. According to him, motivation occurs when a motive is added where there originally was none, which as a practice reflects the characteristic tendency of modern transposition to psychologise (Genette 327). Moreover, a particularly important function of motivation is the internalisation of an external cause (ibid.). In *OB*, a similar process can be seen in the way in which the seemingly arbitrary order of privilege as a birthright in *HE* is replaced by a more meaningful system based on individual talent. Thus, while Leonard’s position in *HE* implies that possibilities for thought are contingent on material condition, Howard’s economic position in *OB* qualifies the implication by attributing success to education attained by individual merit. Despite coming from a working-class background, Howard has nevertheless worked his way to a university post and is able to sustain a comfortable



lifestyle. On the other hand, Leonard's counterpart in *OB* thinks formal education more or less useless: "Large sections of Carl's personality had been constructed on the founding principle that classrooms were not for Carl" (*OB*, 259). Carl has made do with what he can learn by himself without any great intellectual ambition. Unlike Leonard who is "[not] as healthy" as the rich, Carl's social status does not result in any physical impediments. Instead of suffering from deprivation, Carl, "a tall young man with an elegant neck" (*OB*, 71), is repeatedly figured as handsome and with a superior physique compared to the Belsey children, who have after all benefited from the security of a middle-class life.

Regarding the situating of class in hierarchical modes of culture, while Forster may critique the system which allows for Leonard's failure, he nevertheless represents a society in which notions of socially acceptable culture are determined by the possibility of independent means. Smith, on the other hand, enlarges the notion of culture and dismantles the hierarchies by blurring the normative division of culture into high and low varieties. Leonard, who is "obliged to pretend that [he is] genteel" (38), faces the problem of having to compete with those who have gained their knowledge by means of expensive training. As Shirkhani (195) explains, the Schlegels are able to "display [...] knowledge that is socially recognized as valuable" while the thoughts of those like Leonard do not have the same kind of social value. Yet as long as only certain forms of knowledge are socially acceptable, people of Leonard's class are "obliged to pretend" despite never being able to attain the same degree of learning. In *OB*, the notion of culture is less restricted which allows for different modes to exist independently and without the same social stigma present in *HE*. Howard's CD collection consists mainly of electronic music, while, unlike his family who are moved by Mozart, he dislikes classical composers who are "trying to fake [you] into some metaphysical idea by the back door" (*OB*, 72). Teaching poetry at

Wellington, Howard's colleague Claire Malcolm exhibits the same liberal if more inclusive tastes. As a part of her poetry writing class, she takes her students to a local Spoken Word night which becomes an epitome of inclusiveness: "[It was] neither rap nor poetry, not formal but also not too wild, it wasn't black, it wasn't white. It was whatever anybody had to say and whoever had the guts to get up on the [...] stage [...] and say it" (*OB*, 212). Culture, like poetry to Claire, is a "broad church" (*OB*, 212) varied and worth exploring.

Closely linked with representations of class, Smith's novel introduces questions of race as a new theme which is not found in Forster's *HE*. Although it might not be possible to treat race as a direct transposition of an original theme in *HE*, it can be regarded as a new dimension appearing in conjunction with representations of class and society and thus necessarily affecting the meaning of the novel. However, rather than serving as a signpost for the traditional categories of black and white, Smith's decision to include several black characters, while reflecting a distinct change in society when compared to Forster's work, also exposes and ridicules the notion of an essentialist black identity by emphasising the underlying instabilities of the whole category and questioning the role of race in social and class contexts. If we examine the relationship between race and class in the novel, we are quick to find out the relationship between the two categories is not as straightforward as we might think. For instance, Levi, Howard and Kiki's youngest son, finds it incredible that Carl should have got a job at Wellington University. The following exchange between Carl and Levi after Carl has started his new job exposes Levi's class consciousness:

'Black Studies Department. I just started - I'm an archivist.'

'A *what?*' Levi transferred his weight to the opposite foot. 'Man, you screwing with me?'

'Nope.'

'You *work* here. I don't get it - you cleaning?' (*OB*, 387)

Speaking inexplicably with a “faux Brooklyn accent” (*OB*, 11) and going about with black “brothers”, Levi nevertheless betrays an intrinsically middle-class view by refusing to believe that Carl could work as anything but a cleaner at the university. Yet his assumption is more a result of class distinctions than racial stereotypes: having lived all his life in a mixed race family, it is hard to believe Levi could be blamed for the same type of racial prejudice as Howard’s father, who could never quite understand why his son married an African-American woman. Despite Levi’s attempt at “street cred”, Carl and Levi are divided by an economic gulf which at least in part determines their individual opportunities.

The fact that Levi does not equate manual labour with the fact that Carl is black does not mean that the novel’s characters are unaware of racial issues. Yet their display of this awareness is often ironically undercut by their personal feelings. Kiki is a good example. At the Mozart concert where Carl first meets the Belsey family, Kiki feels pride when her oldest son Jerome is moved to tears by the music:

A young black man of intelligence and sensibility, and *I* have raised him. After all, how many other young black men would even come to an event like this - I bet there isn’t one in this entire crowd, thought Kiki, and then checked and was mildly annoyed to find that indeed there was one, a tall young man with an elegant neck, sitting next to her daughter. (*OB*, 71)

Kiki’s pride in her son demonstrates the assumption that intelligent young black men are still a rare sight in a predominantly white context of culture. Although this appears to reinforce cultural elitism as an aspect of white society, Kiki’s annoyance at Carl’s presence undermines any such simple paradigm. Attributing Jerome’s acquisition of culture to her methods of upbringing, Kiki’s feelings about her own efforts being superior to other black people’s are made to appear ridiculous by Carl’s presence in the audience. He has come of his own free will without the

benefits of a good education to guide his tastes. It is clear from Kiki's as well as Levi's actions that no simple sense of loyalty or uniformity guides the construction of racial identity.

As we have seen, the somewhat problematic representations of race and class in *OB* clearly signal some of the instabilities of contemporary society regarding complex issues like the construction of identity and social equality. Thus the introduction of issues such as race and ethnicity which are missing from *HE* brings the story into closer proximity with a contemporary audience by developing a theme which was not as current at the time Forster wrote his novel.

Although Genette discusses the movement of proximization which occurs between the hypotext and the hypertext mainly as a part of diegetic transpositions which affect the spatiotemporal world of the novel, I consider that the role of race in *OB* shows that the notion of proximization is worth expanding since it can result from any transpositional practice. Of course, it should be remembered that Genette does not intend his categories of transformation to isolate or limit hypertextual phenomena which are after all combined differently in each work. Yet it is well to be aware that the movement towards postmodernism reflected in the changes Smith has made to Forster's novel is not the result of a single transposition but rather the consequence of several transformative operations affecting all levels of the story. In the next section, we will examine the process of transmotivation more closely and find out how the typically contemporary shift from political to psychological motivation questions the significance of political reality.

### **2.2.2 Displacing politics**

While Smith employs Forster's familial set up in order to explore dysfunctional family dynamics which is as much a part of the Edwardian as well as the contemporary setting, her construction of the opposition between the two families departs in places from that in *HE*. A clear distinction is

drawn between the families in *HE*: the Schlegels, a family of two sisters and a younger brother, are liberal, cultured and supported by a private income while the conservative Wilcoxes move in a no-nonsense world of business and property. Smith in turn takes this expressly political opposition between liberalism and conservatism and transforms it into a question of academic rivalry between two critics holding different views on art. These academics, Howard Belsey and Montague Kipps, head the families who, like the Schlegels and Wilcoxes, take the centre stage of the story. The Kippes too hold conservative views, while Howard Belsey is a would-be Marxist, yet the political battlefield foregrounded in *HE* gives way to an academic one in *OB*. This change of focus from political to academic opposition intimates the shift towards the postmodern age where the “real” world of politics gives way to the “virtual” world of academic discourse illustrated by different interpretations of Rembrandt’s paintings. The notion of intertextuality as it relates to interpretation and the construction of meaning will also form the basis for a much more detailed discussion of the functions of Rembrandt in *OB* in the following chapter. Yet, as we have seen, simply by comparing the representations of political creeds in *HE* and *OB* and exploring the changes to political motivation we not only get an intimation of the overall shift from the real towards the virtual, but also understand more concretely the detailed effects of transmotivation in postmodern fiction.

Despite the emphasis in *OB* on the academic world, the representations of the political sphere which determine many of the underlying oppositions in *HE* are not forgotten. But whereas in Forster’s *HE* the uneasy relationship between liberalism and conservatism provides one of the major thematic frameworks for investigating the novel, in Smith’s work the same theme, while employed in a similar way to *HE*, is utilised to a much lesser extent. An apt point of comparison is the difference between liberal and conservative attitudes towards social

obligation and responsibility. In *HE*, the Schlegels who are devoted liberal intellectuals display a painful awareness of social inequality while their privileged background makes them at least in part complicit in the process responsible for it. Their attempt at reconciling their situation in life with that of those less fortunate leads the Schlegels on a mission to help the unfortunate clerk Leonard Bast to secure a better life. The Wilcox response to the Schlegel's mediation illustrates well their differing outlooks. Henry Wilcox, after finding out about the Schlegel's project, scolds them for their assumption that Bast's life needs improving:

'[...] You know nothing about him. He probably has his own joys and interests - wife, children, snug little home. That's where we practical fellows are [...] more tolerant than you intellectuals. We live and let live, and assume that things are jogging on fairly well elsewhere, and that that the ordinary plain man may be trusted to look after his own affairs.' (*HE*, 124)

Henry's "live and let live" motto as well as his belief that the "ordinary man" can "look after his own affairs" illustrates a type of laissez-faire attitude diametrically opposed to the Schlegels' overwhelming need to interfere. But, as Shirkhani (204) points out, even though Henry's opinion might seem like an admirable refusal to interfere, his logic still suggests a problematic double standard which assumes that what is good for people of Leonard's class is not what is good for wealthy imperialists. If the Wilcoxes, happy in their economic and social superiority, are unwilling to help Leonard, the Schlegels fare little better. Their various attempts at securing Leonard a better job, together with Henry's refusal to help, lead Leonard to financial ruin and ultimately result in his death.

In *OB*, while the representations of political opposition reiterate the liberal/conservative binaries of *HE*, the question of social responsibility surfaces most forcibly in the context of the character's attitudes towards affirmative action. However, compared to *HE*, the representations of the political sphere in *OB* are often ironically overshadowed by personal

motives which undermine the importance of any overdetermined political reality. If we return for a moment to Genette's ideas about motivation, that is, introducing a motive to an action which had none in the hypertext, we are also led to other significant procedures of semantic transformation, namely transmotivation, which occurs when one motivation displaces another (324). As a term, transmotivation is useful since it helps to illustrate how some of the politically charged motives in *HE* are replaced or at least augmented in *OB* by a more psychological motivation. Firstly, if we look at the question of social obligation, we find that in *OB*, Monty Kipps holds similar views to Henry Wilcox in *HE* whereas the Belseys and Schlegels have the same type of liberal outlook. In *OB*, the question of helping people of Leonard's class which appeared in *HE* is transformed into a debate about affirmative action. Discussing the matter with Kiki, Monty Kipps makes his support for anti-affirmative action well known: "As long as we encourage a culture of victimhood, [...] we will continue to raise victims. And so the cycle of underachievement continues" (*OB*, 368). Monty's refusal to promote equal opportunities by helping the less well-off to secure a place at the university echoes Henry Wilcox's unwillingness to interfere with the "ordinary plain man". And just as the Schlegels in *HE* refuse to leave the less fortunate to their own devices, so the Belseys seek to promote forms of diversity by rallying for affirmative action.

However, if we examine the seemingly political motivation in *OB* more closely, we find out it is frequently eclipsed by psychological motivation. Though the process of transmotivation in Genette's terms is taken to mean one motive displacing another, in the light of some of the transformations in *OB*, it might be more meaningful to treat the two motives not as mutually exclusive but as existing side by side. In *OB*, the transposed motive of the hypertext may outweigh the motive of the hypotext but it does not erase it. For instance, Zora's fervent

petitioning for Carl to keep his place at the university as a “discretionary” student who pays no fees might fall in line with her liberal beliefs in the policies of affirmative action, but it quickly becomes clear that she also hopes for a romantic involvement with him. After starting his job, Carl and Zora’s friendship is disrupted when it becomes clear that Zora, in Carl’s words, is “expect[ing] some payback” for everything she has done for him (*OB*, 413). The significance of political motivation, which is nevertheless a part of *OB*, is greatly diminished by psychological motives like love in Zora’s case.

Another illustrative example of the same type of thematic transposition in terms of motivation in *OB* is the ideological reversal of the failure to help Leonard in *HE* into the successful campaign to help Carl. Significantly, Carl secures his job only because Howard and Claire’s colleague Erskine is tired of being troubled with the matter:

When someone was determined to destroy his peace and well-being, when they refused either to like him or to allow him to live the quiet life he most desired, when they were, as in the case of Carl Thomas, giving someone a headache who was in turn giving *Erskine* a headache, in situations like these, Erskine, in his capacity as Assistant Director of the Black Studies Department, simply gave them a job. (*OB*, 372, original emphasis)

The ironic overtones of the narrative clearly undermine the altruism of Erskine’s motives. Zora’s liberal ideals may have been an impetus for Carl being hired, but Erskine’s solution “in situations like these” nevertheless creates the impression his motives for ridding himself of people “determined to destroy his peace and well-being” are distinctly personal. Whatever political motivation there may have been, it is severely compromised by psychological factors.

### **2.2.3 Only disconnect**

In addition to the discrete and antagonistic political camps in *HE* illustrated in the previous section, Forster draws another dichotomous distinction between the private, represented by the



Schlegels, and the public, represented by the Wilcoxes. The characters' attempt to connect the "inner life" with the "outer life" results arguably in perhaps the novel's most distinct failures to reconcile two opposites. Levenson's (304-5) claim that Forster chooses the private before the public and advocates intimacy as an alternative in an age of imperialism is true only if we regard the novel's ending as a symbolic triumph of the Schlegelian values at the expense of a whole class of Wilcoxes working for the Empire. What this view fails to consider is not only the great cost of the Schlegel victory but also the ambivalence with which the desirability of the "inner life" is depicted. Margaret's engagement to Henry Wilcox intimates the difficulty of reconciliation: "And if insight were sufficient, if the inner life were the whole of life, their happiness had been assured" (*HE*, 157). But the "inner life" is not the "whole of life" as Margaret herself acknowledges to her sister: "'The truth is that there is a great outer life that you and I have never touched - a life in which telegrams and anger count'" (*HE*, 23). The world of the Wilcoxes "where telegrams and anger count" represents the "great outer life", which is the direct opposite of the Schlegel sisters' cultured and intimate world of personal relations. By attempting connection through personal relations, Margaret's marriage to Henry does provide greater hope for the private than the public, but the results of that marriage speak against the unqualified eminence of the "inner life".

Though the marriage that the novel works towards has the potential to unify the Schlegels and Wilcoxes despite their differing outlooks, instead of presenting the characters in a harmonious union, the novel's conclusion leaves Henry Wilcox entirely "broken up", while Margaret has had to abandon many of her former values. Although Margaret has forgiven Henry for having had an affair with Leonard's wife Jacky, his moral and social failures reduce him to

nothing. Henry's final defeat after his son's imprisonment is depicted in terms of a city under siege:

The Henry's fortress gave way. He could bear no one but his wife, he shambled up to Margaret afterwards and asked her to do what she could with him. She did what seemed easiest – she took him down to recruit at Howards End. (*HE*, 285)

Henry's defences crumble and he is left a "shambling" old man dependent on his wife alone. By simply doing "what seemed easiest", Margaret's acceptance of the situation implies a disregard for her own former ideals. Her final epiphany comes after she finds out Henry has disregarded Mrs Wilcox's final request to leave Howards End to her: "Margaret was silent. Something shook her in its inmost recesses, and she shivered" (*HE*, 293). Margaret's subsequent assurance that "[n]othing has been done wrong" is a weak counterpoint to her initial reaction and does little to abate the sense of injustice the dismissal of a dying woman's will has engendered. As White (56) has noted, the novel's conclusion emphasises the great cost suffered by both the Schlegels and Wilcoxes. Henry has been broken and Margaret has seriously compromised her values by forgiving, or appearing to forgive, all of Henry's failures.

In *OB*, the uneasy dialogue between the personal and public spheres of life also surfaces in the context of marriage and extramarital affairs. Even though the distinction between public and private in *OB* might not be as clear cut as in *HE*, Howard Belsey exhibits the same kind of moral hypocrisy as Henry Wilcox when it comes to judging others. Yet, unlike Henry, Howard is more willing to acknowledge his guilt. Henry's inability to connect the "inner life" with the "outer life", his refusal to understand or to forgive others comes to a head after it has been revealed that Margaret's sister Helen has had an illicit affair with Leonard and is expecting his child. Margaret tries to force him to apply the same set of morals with which he regards Helen to his own actions:

‘You shall see the connection even if it kills you, Henry! You have had a mistress - I forgave you. My sister has a lover - you drive her from the house. Do you see the connection?’ (*HE*, 263)

Of course, he does not. After Margaret’s outburst Henry merely accuses her of blackmail.

Margaret’s appeal is for the unifying force of personal relations and forgiveness, of which she tries to make an example, but as Hoy (232-3) has pointed out, despite his union with Margaret at *Howards End*, Henry is unable to inspire us to believe that he has developed any proper sense of the “inner life”.

The contemporary version of the traditional notion of marital infidelity, Howard Belsey, is an epitome of disconnection. His affair with Monty’s daughter is a striking representation of the inability to recognise personal and public realities. In *OB*, Howard’s hypocritical mirth over his academic rival’s philandering dissipates quickly after Howard’s own affair with a student is discovered. Just as Henry in *HE* fails to understand how he and Helen are in the same situation, so Howard in *OB* dismisses the idea of his own infidelity when attacking Monty Kipps for having had an affair with a student. When Howard’s daughter Zora tells him of Kipps’ affair, Howard gleefully thinks he should be “destroyed” and his indiscretion made public to the whole university. But the moment of realisation as Zora outs her own father reveals Howard’s moral fraud:

Howard’s face stayed the same. It took a minute. The Victoria incident was so happily concluded in his mind that it was a mental stretch to remember that this did not mean the incident was not a real thing in the world, capable of discovery. (*OB*, 432)

Howard has promptly forgotten his brief affair with Monty’s daughter Victoria. By dismissing the “Victoria incident” from his mind, Howard has also erased it from his own perception of reality, making it a “mental stretch” to understand the incident was real at all. Such a gulf between relating one’s own actions to those of other people illustrates the same type of stark

disconnection between the inner and outer, the personal and public, which was apparent in *HE*. However, after Howard understands he has been discovered, he is quick to beg Zora's forgiveness. Yet, while he acknowledges his guilt more readily than Henry in *HE*, his pleas to be forgiven seem too perfunctory to warrant real repentance.

The patriarchal mode of thinking which reflects the hostility of the public or outer life to the idea of connection in *HE* is replaced in *OB* by the world of ideas represented by academic discourse. As we have discovered in an earlier section of Smith's novel, Howard's affair with Monty's daughter is not his only weak spot. Before Victoria, Howard also had an affair with Claire Malcolm, a colleague and a personal friend of the Belseys, which was subsequently found out by Kiki. Interestingly, if we contrast Howard's attempt at resolving the situation to that of Henry's in *HE*, we find out that while Henry hopes to justify his affair with Jacky by appealing to a moral paradigm which distinguishes between feminine and masculine conduct, Howard, on the other hand, evades the entire issue by retreating to a world of academic discourse. The following passages from the two novels illustrate the different reactions Henry Wilcox and Howard Belsey have to being confronted about their infidelity:

'You, with your sheltered life, and refined pursuits, and friends, and books, you and your sister, and women like you - I say, how can you guess the temptations that lie round a man?' (*HE*, 209)

'...the onus is on me, I know that. It's for me to - to - explain my narrative in a way that's comprehensible... and achieves an ... I don't know, explanation, I suppose, in term of motivation...' (*OB*, 204)

What the first passage demonstrates is Henry's attempt at defending himself on the grounds of being a man. His belief that "women like you", that is Margaret and her sister Helen, cannot even conceive of a world, the real world, where men are forced to make their way amid "temptations" not only casts women in the role of ignorant or naive bystanders but also implicitly insists on

there being a distinction between the moral codes for men and women. The patriarchal view exemplified by Henry's outburst clearly emphasises the precariousness of the whole Wilcox outlook by falling back on the traditional oppositions deposed by the concept of reconciliation and connection.

Clearly, instead of relying on gender binaries, Smith utilises the more postmodern concept of discourse in representing the failures of connection. True to the movement of proximization, this transposition again reflects the distance between the two texts and the necessity of bringing the themes more up to date and is indicative of the contemporary setting. If Henry's reaction is to justify his behaviour on account of his sex, Howard in turn seeks to escape his actions by forcing them into the same intellectual sphere of ideas with his work exemplified by the use of academic diction. In the second passage, we have Howard's halting explanation as he and Kiki try to discuss Howard's affair with Claire. The clipped academic language like explaining a "narrative [...] in terms of motivation" makes the attempt at reconciliation seem ludicrous and out of touch with everyday reality. By resorting to a familiar dry discourse, Howard sidesteps the personal sphere of emotions and escapes his wife's remonstrations into an intellectual world where consequences can be rationalised away. As with Victoria, it is as if Howard again forgets that his actions are "a real thing in the world, capable of discovery". This lack of awareness demonstrates the same type of inability to understand and connect with the personal and private which was illustrated in *HE* by Henry's blindness to his own actions. However, whereas Henry's appeal is to what he regards as the real world of men where even infidelity has its place, in *OB* Howard seeks to deny the real world value of his affair entirely by making it a part of academic discourse. Again we see how the real is transposed into the virtual

as the thematic transformations in *OB* affect a contemporary frame of reference for the themes in *HE*.

The duplicity of the object, as Genette (398-9) tells us, finds a fitting representation in the analogy of the palimpsest: each text superimposed on a single parchment allows the earlier text to show through without entirely concealing it. In this chapter, we have examined the ways in which Forster's *HE* "shows through" the intricate layers of Smith's *OB* by focusing in particular on the types of transformation affecting the structure, setting and themes of Smith's novel. Genette's *Palimpsest* has provided the needed tools for illustrating the relationship between the hypertext and the hypotext and offered an insight into some of the basic effects of hypertextual rewriting. By exploring the binary representation of the major themes in *HE*, we have also been able to discover how those themes have been reconstructed in *OB* to reflect contemporary concerns and how the thematic transpositions made by Smith have greatly affected the meaning of Forster's Edwardian novel. However, while I consider Genette's ideas especially useful in the mapping of explicit as well as implicit intertextual links between two works of literature, his structuralist notions seem most adaptable only when applied to the analysis of a single intertext and its subsequent rewriting. Unlike many poststructuralist theorists, what Genette does not seem to question is the stability of the authoritative text. In the next chapter we will therefore move on to grapple with a more nebulous concept of intertextuality and the construction of meaning in light of poststructuralist notions such as Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author".

### **3. The poststructuralist reader: interpreting Rembrandt**

While E.M. Forster helped peel off a layer of textual relations in *OB*, it is Rembrandt who opens up a multivocal space of intertextuality which situates *OB* well within deconstructionist and postmodern thinking. Rembrandt plays a complex role in *OB*: his paintings, like Forster's novel, act as intertexts introducing new meanings and link Smith's novel to a network of textuality. Rembrandt is also the focal point of the academic contention between the two rival characters, Howard Belsey and Monty Kipps, whose theoretical takes on art and individual genius represent the contradictory ideologies of Marxism and conservatism. In the novel, Rembrandt's paintings appear as visual texts upon which several characters impose their readings, thus producing texts about other texts and entering into an endless field of textual relations. As the multiple interpretations of Rembrandt's works in *OB* illustrate, the point where the threads of meaning come together is not the author but the reader – it is not the origin but the destination where the text finds its unity. As we will see, it is not the author or painter whose intentions define a work and imbue it with meaning. What is demonstrated in Smith's novel, in a typically wry and questioning manner, is precisely the multivalency of texts and the problematic of interpretation in light of poststructuralist theories of intertextuality. Thus by constructing a fictional debate about the meaning of art Smith displays an awareness of the theoretical issues in the field of intertextual studies as well as interrogating the personal and human aspects of aesthetic experience.

#### **3.1 The Death of the Author**

The term intertextuality, despite confidently appearing in the titles of studies and textbooks, is far from conveying the simplicity accredited by its frequent use in literary theory. Referring to a

diverse and expanding theoretical field, as Mary Orr notes, a single definition or delimited application of intertextuality are in fact impossible (60). The term was originally coined by Julia Kristeva, while its theoretical origins can be found in Saussurean linguistics, semiotics and poststructuralism and its parameters is firmly grounded in the French intellectual scene of the 1960s (Orr 6). Since then, the notions of text and intertextuality, as can be seen from several guides and glosses, have had great impetus from a series of theorists including Kristeva, Bakhtin, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Riffaterre, Genette and Bloom. Attesting to a certain canonisation of the theoretical field, more recent studies such as Mary Orr's *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* have in their turn sought to eschew the received version of intertextuality by revealing the diversity and contradictions characterising the field. It is clear from its multiple proponents and differing theories that intertextuality lends itself to a variety of uses. Among the most heatedly debated manifestos of the field is Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author", which calls into question the relationship and hierarchy between the author and the reader and lays out a setting for the discussion of texts and the space of writing. By being one of the first and certainly the most arresting efforts to instigate a theoretical shift towards the reader, Barthes's essay and the ideas presented in it pave the way for an interesting examination of the role Rembrandt's paintings play in *OB* and help shed light on the nuanced intertextual framework presented by the academic debate Smith has constructed in her novel.

Barthes's essay was published for the first time in 1967 as an English translation in the Fall-Winter issue of the American art magazine *Aspen*, after which it appeared in the original French a year later (North 1378). Ever since the publication of "The Death of the Author", several writers and novelists have been quick to declare themselves alive and well while many of Barthes's opponents have not been able to resist pointing out the apparent inconsistency of



happily scooping up royalties after the author has been declared dead (cf. Burke 22). But what Barthes condemns is not the person doing the writing but the critical stance that invokes the author as a source of meaning and thus closes down interpretation by explaining the text on the basis of biographical detail. Critical biography assigns the text with a secret meaning outside the work and outside language which can be reduced to the details of the author's life. Yet reading, as Barthes insists, is not deciphering: "the space of the writing is to be ranged over, not pierced" (147). Contrary to Genette's analogy of the palimpsest we discussed before, to Barthes there is nothing *beneath* the text. There is no underlying ground where the author could be found positing a final explanation of the work. Writing, meanwhile, according to Barthes, is the "destruction of every voice, every point of origin" – to write is to enter into a relationship with other writing (142). It follows then that the removal of the author calls for the birth of the reader, a substitution Barthes readily offers. The unity of a text, he explains, is situated not in its origin but in its destination (Barthes 148).

In order to understand some of Barthes's claims and particularly the way they affect notions of intertextuality, we need to look more closely at what he means by work and text. In his essay "From Work to Text" Barthes lays out new definitions for the traditional terms "work" and "text" by identifying the former with the possibility of meaning and the latter with the constant play of the signifier. According to Barthes, work is a material object of substance which occupies a space in books and which can be held in the hand while the text is a "methodological field" which can only be "held in language" (157). Freeing the text from material constraints, Barthes emphatically notes that the text "is experienced only in an activity of production" (ibid). The traditional notion of the work, on the other hand, proffers the possibility of traceable meaning by closing on a signified, functioning ultimately as a general

sign the signification of which may either fall under the scope of interpretation or be taken as evident (Barthes 158). To say then that the Text is plural does not simply mean that it has several meanings. As Barthes writes in “From Work to Text”:

The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends [...] on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). The reader of the Text may be compared to someone at a loose end. (159, original italics)

The reader no longer discovers meaning but follows it as it ebbs and flows (Allen 67). The plurality of the signifier means that no signified can fully stabilise meaning since no word means one thing alone. So it follows that the “explosion” and “dissemination” of meaning that characterise the text do not yield to discovery but are instead to be experienced by the reader in the act of production. It is important to note, however, as Graham Allen (67-8) points out, that Barthes’s version of the text is not a unified, determinate object which can be solidified. The text is plural and intertextual to the core and as such foregrounds the role of the reader as a producer of meaning.

What makes Barthes ideas particularly useful in examining intertextuality is the way they work to destabilise apparently stable and natural concepts such as origin, meaning, author and reader. In “From Work to Text” Barthes touches on the important point of filiation in discussing the origins of the text:

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are citations without inverted commas. (160, original italics)

In this definition of the text Barthes is seeking to disturb the seemingly natural notion of origins. The text functions as part of an attack on monological concepts of determinate meaning since by

consisting of “anonymous” and “untraceable” citations it can never be exhausted by interpretation. The text is situated in the intertextual and is made up of everything that exists between that text and other texts. As we can see, Barthes’s version of intertextuality has nothing to do with sources and influence despite the fact that influence and intertextuality are often clumped together as two sides of the same coin (cf. Clayton and Rothstein). The “myth of filiation” is also something which dominates the perceived relationship between the author and text as well as that between the author and reader which comes under attack in “The Death of the Author”. As Allen explains, notions of authority, ownership, paternity and filiation are what ratify the ideology of the author and allow the author full agency and dominance over the text (71). It is against this system of meaning imparted by the author Barthes launches his famous attack calling for the death of all author-centric criticism.

In order to debunk the capitalist figure of the author which characterises the modern period, Barthes seeks to construct an intertextual world where meaning is independent of authorial intention. In attacking the author, he lays out a view of dominating literary criticism where the explanation of a work is sought in the person responsible for producing it and fiction is read as the voice of a that person, the author “confiding” in us (Barthes 143). Yet, if the text is in fact a “tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” where a variety of writings clash and blend, the author can no longer be held as the source or origin behind it (Barthes 146). However, it is important to note that despite assigning agency to language, Barthes does not murder the concept of the author completely. In his account of intertextuality there is room for the “modern scriptor”, someone who only arranges and inscribes the already written, spoken and read into the “multi-dimensional space” of the text without releasing any single “theological” meaning (ibid.). Thus, according to Barthes, the previous image of the God-

like author needs to give way to an intertextual network of relations where signifiers lead to other signifiers and every text is an intertextual construct without a stable, recoverable meaning. As Allen (74) has noted, in Barthes's use intertextuality destroys the "myth of filiation" by denying that meaning comes from and is the property of the individual conscious of the author. Once the link between author and meaning is destroyed, both the author and critic are turned into readers by the intertextual nature of writing – the reader is born at the expense of the author.

While Barthes's substitution of one figure of authority for another is not entirely unproblematic, the shift towards the reader is nevertheless a valuable reversal of hierarchies which offers a new perspective to theoretical thinking. In a sweeping statement, Barthes defines the reader as the "space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost" (148). Posing another somewhat problematic outline, Barthes goes on to state that there is nothing personal about the reader: "the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that *someone* who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted" (ibid., original emphasis). At the conclusion of "The Death of the Author" Barthes has posited the figure of the reader as a replacement for the author who dies in the course of the essay. The reader is here set against the earlier totalised visions of meaning as an answer to the false dominance of the author. Yet, as several critics have acknowledged (e.g. Burke 27; Allen 76), the figuration of the reader as someone who unifies a text and hold together every constituting thread and citation is in itself contradictory to the poststructuralist notion of plurality and difference. By being able to contain and possess all difference, Barthes's reader seems to be just as totalising a figure as the author he takes arms against, especially if the reader is construed as an entirely ahistorical "someone" without psychology or biography. Nevertheless, despite some of Barthes's seeming contradictions, his

notions privilege the reader in a way which allows for a novel perspective on the construction and (in)stability of meaning and alert us to the inherent struggle between the different positions he explores.

The criticism attracted by Barthes's strident essay is by no means limited to the figuration of the reader. Being the centre of critical controversy has given the "The Death of the Author" and Barthes's ideas along with it an appearance of disreputability frequently exacerbated by public claims made by authors themselves professing to stand wholeheartedly behind their own works. Critics, on the other hand, have made painstaking examinations of the tensions and contradictions Barthes's works exhibit. For instance, exploring the premise of Barthes's argument, Seán Burke (26) claims that he is attacking an institution, that is the author, that no longer exists and by doing so is in fact participating in its (re)construction. As evidence Burke cites the practices of Russian Formalist and the Anglo-American school of New Criticism with its traditions of the intentional fallacy, the unreliable narrator and the implied author (25-6). It is interesting to note that Barthes himself claims contrarily that New Criticism has done very little to sway the power of the author (143). While criticism has certainly laid open some of the possible blind spots and inconsistencies within Barthes's writings, it still stands that his notions of texts and intertextuality are important because they seek to destabilise and disturb the hierarchy and filiation between the author and reader which before had gone largely unquestioned. To engage with Barthes's texts, Allen (76) writes, it is not enough to list and map contradictions and choose within them: the reader must also recognise that the texts not only explore but also embody the clash between the discourses and ideologies presented in them.

### 3.2 The Birth of the Reader

As can be seen from the above discussion, what Barthes's key theoretical notions provide us with is an important focus point – the reader. From the sea of characters that make up her novel, Smith offers us readers in the guise of art historians, university students and poets who are all made to grapple with the works of the Dutch master Rembrandt. While the antagonism between Howard Belsey and Montague Kipps sparks over the “culture myth of Rembrandt” (54) and his canonical representation as an artistic genius, the poet Claire and the young student Katie Armstrong, who is attending Howard's seminar, exhibit the effects of personal experiences in the act of interpretation. The emphasis on the possibility of multiple interpretations that can be seen in Smith's work illustrates well the shift from author to reader and advocates notions of difference privileged by poststructuralist theorists. That meaning can never be stabilised, not even by the one theoretical reader proposed by Barthes, is embodied by the various interpretations of Rembrandt's works as well as the subjective nature of aesthetic experience instantiated in the novel. While *OB* represents a wryly concocted version of the debate on meaning which displays a distinct awareness of the trends in intertextual studies, we can also see how Smith's work comes to displace any overtly theoretical constructs in favour of a highly personal engagement with art as the basis for humanity.

Howard and Monty, the true academics that they are, provide us with a perfect instance of the Barthesian dialectic between intended meaning and textual multivalency. By presenting a pointedly mismanaged public argument between the two characters on authorial intention, Smith's explicitly acknowledges and demonstrates the pervasiveness of deconstructionist thinking though all the while her ironic treatment of the characters establishes a firm dichotomy between academia and the outside world. At a faculty meeting set to evaluate the

nature of Monty's proposed lecture series, Howard attacks him in the firm belief that his speeches will bring down the liberal values of the college. Responding to Howard's tirade against him, Monty wastes no time in jeering at Howard's perceived fallacy of wanting to know what he *intends* by the lectures:

In fact, I admit it surprises and delights me that a self-professed "textual anarchist" like Dr Belsey should be so passionate to know the *intention* of a piece of writing... [...] Now is it not *you*, Doctor, who speaks of the instability of textual meaning? Is it not *you*, Doctor, who speaks of the indeterminacy of all sign systems? (*OB*, 327-8, original italics)

On the surface of it, Monty's taunt speaks precisely of the academic position represented by Howard, which calls into question the possibility of fixed signification and which is diametrically opposed to Monty's own adherence to the view that "Art [is] a gift from God, blessing only a handful of masters" (*OB*, 44). Howard's intellectual regime privileges much of what intertextual theory has brought to the fore in academic debate, whereas Monty with typical theological gusto leans on the tradition of "the Author-God" attacked by Barthes.

As the irony in the above passage intimates, in addition to directly addressing trends in influence theory Smith also seeks to represent the alienating side of academia. What Monty and Howard's argument undoubtedly demonstrates is how far removed their theoretical views are from everyday realities. Howard on his side is outraged by Monty's highly reactionary views on issues of race, religion and sexual orientation, while Monty deems it important to pursue his freedom of speech. By fusing their argument with glaringly out-of-place jibes at academic practices as demonstrated by the above passage, Smith highlights the gaping discrepancy between political and social realities and academic discourse, which have very little to do with each other on the level of affecting the lives of individuals. Whether Wellington continues its policy of affirmative action or consents to give voice to conservative "propaganda" is not a question of academic bent. Going below the surface representations of theoretical

notions, *OB* also sets up a commentary on the limitations of an academic approach which is further developed especially in relation to the nature of art and its implications for personal ethics.

Before examining more closely the various ways in which interpretations construct meanings in the novel as well as interrogating the eclipse of academia in greater depth, it might be useful to draw attention in particular to the presence and reconstruction of Rembrandt's paintings in *OB* and to art criticism in general. First, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the concept of text is also extended to visual works despite its more common denotation being primarily linked with written language. Thus while we have for instance discussed Barthes's notions of text and *intertextuality*, it needs to be noted that the same terminology can be applied to images and paintings. According to art historian Mieke Bal whose book *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (1991) focuses on the relationship between the visual and verbal domains, literary texts and visual images do not form distinctive categories but are in fact constantly intertwined in cultural life (5). The visual arts produce meaning in a slightly different but not an opposed way to literature: "reading" images relies on interpretation the same way as reading texts does (Bal 9). Bal's notions seem particularly acute when we consider the choice of painter whose works Smith weaves into her novel, and even though she has not mentioned Bal by name, Smith does cite another Rembrandt critic, Simon Schama, as her source of inspiration (*OB*, acknowledgements). In *OB* we have literary representations of different interpretations of several of Rembrandt's paintings upon which we in turn impose new interpretations. Thus it is perhaps necessary to be aware that despite working primarily with literary representations, *OB* nevertheless refers us to the visual arts and presents different levels of visuality we may consider in order to engage more fully with the novel.



### 3.2.1 Rembrandt unbound

Monty Kipps's type of slavish author-worship is an epitome of the kind of criticism that originally helped to engender Barthes's "The Death of the Author". As became clear in chapter 2, in order to set a resonating opposition to Howard's left-wing ideology, Monty Kipps's theoretical line on Rembrandt is inherently essentialist and conservative, while his privileged position as an educated upper-class academic makes him considered worthy of pronouncing judgement. Symptomatically of his adherence to the individual genius of the artist, Monty believes that "Art [is] a gift from God, blessing only a handful of masters, and most Literature merely a veil for poorly reasoned left-wing ideologies" (*OB*, 44). The interpretative position exemplified by Monty is precisely that which Barthes's famously attacked. To consider the author, or in this case painter, as an exceptional individual confiding in us is to reaffirm the "myth of filiation" (Allen 74) which undermines the productive role of interpretation altogether. Concentrating on the author endangers whatever power the reader might have. As Catherine Belsey has recently reminded us in evaluating the methods of New Historicism, biography is in fact a substitute for reading and calls for the death of the reader (212). While Monty's character escapes the problematic implications of the reader's death by situating himself in the same dehumanised continuum of divine insight as the artist, the challenge to the autonomy of his position by other, more demonstrative interpretations in *OB* effectively speaks for a more deconstructionist take on art and its interpretation.

Despite avowing the naturalness of the elitist tradition of genius, even Monty's branch of criticism does not escape from the presence of subjectivity in the act of interpretation as every view on a work of art is necessarily informed by the background of the person doing the analysis. As Bal explains, the interpretation of visual or verbal representations can never escape

subjective standards and ideologies: the attempt by historical interpretations to repress the subjectivity of the analyst by concentrating on the author often only manages to pass off the projections of the former as intentions of the latter (5). Thus the reader and the work are inseparable. On the one hand we have pitted against this the canonical cult of the author, on the other hand this view is taken to a totalising extreme by the poststructuralist notion of the reader as someone without psychology and history gathering together in a single field the uncountable threads of meaning (Barthes 148). While these positions are represented to varying degrees by Monty and Howard respectively, negotiating a position between the figures of the author and reader and breaking down the presumed polarity between them becomes the basis for some of the other characters' attempts to understand Rembrandt in *OB* as is demonstrated by the poet Claire and Howard's student Katie.

Howard colleague's Claire's relationship to art illustrates that interpretation has room for contradiction while even the emotive response has a firm footing in academia. A discussion with Howard reveals Claire's objection to his insistence on the primacy of theory as they "prim[e] up for one of their age-old battles. Essence versus theory. Belief versus power. Art versus cultural systems" (*OB*, 120). To Howard's exasperation, Claire is on the side of "essence" and "art", which is reflected in the way she teaches and understands poetry:

Claire spoke often in her poetry about the idea of "fittingness": that is, when your chosen pursuit and your ability to achieve it – no matter how small or insignificant both might be – are matched exactly, are fitting. *This*, Claire argues, is when we become truly human, fully ourselves, beautiful. (*OB*, 214, original italics)

The conflation of humanity and beauty suggest a strong belief in the centrality of aesthetic experience. As Kathleen Wall (765) notes, to sidestep the "unloving analysis of the art object" that is explicated in Smith's representation of the academy, Claire believes in the "spirit" of art which seems to open up a much wider, more natural field of possibilities for creation and

experience. The emphasis on essence in opposition to theory underlines the intrinsic value of things in the same way that art for Claire can never be merely reduced to cultural systems. The representation of Claire's belief in humanity and beauty demonstrates the variability of perspective inside the academic sphere as well as foregrounding the thematic importance of subjectivity in the novel.

If we examine Claire's response to the painter Rembrandt, we can see how it synthesises a subjective perspective with an appreciation for artistic genius. It is also worth noting particularly how Claire's seemingly contradictory reaction to Rembrandt's painting *The Shipbuilder and His Wife* (1633) (see fig. 1) is able to contain the dichotomies it poses:

[...] the *physicality* of it, like he's digging *in* to the canvas to get what's really *in* those faces, in that marriage – that's the thing, I think. It's almost *anti*-portraiture: he doesn't want you to look at the faces; he wants you to look at the *souls*. The faces are just a way *in*. It's the purest kind of genius. (OB, 54, original italics)

The concentration on "physicality" seems at a first glance to be at odds with the almost metaphysical aspect of looking into a person's "soul". Yet the physical realm of observation is a "way *in*" for Claire, a point of departure for experience rather than an epistemological signpost for analysis. Similarly, the above passage suggests a twofold way of looking at the artist. It starts off as representing the artist more as a reader than a creator: he "dig[s] *in* to the canvas" trying to "get", to understand, to gain possession of what his subject means. However, the figure of the author is evoked again as Claire concludes her response by estimating that Rembrandt's way of making you look at the painting is nevertheless proof of the "purest kind of genius". Like an optical illusion, the painter simultaneously performs the double function of interpreter and creator, merely arranging the multidimensional space of the text all the while perpetrating the myth of intention. Yet the fact that Claire's character sees the painting as a depiction of marriage intimates her personal involvement – a page later she bursts out with the news that she has

recently got married. If the lack of a consistent perspective to interpretation stands for the instability of the art object, then subjective intuition offers an encompassing option to academic rigour.

The character whose precocious relationship with Rembrandt's works is described in most detail in Smith's novel is Howard's 16-year-old student Katie Armstrong, who makes a hasty appearance at the end of the novel's middle section entitled *The Anatomy Lesson* after Rembrandt's best-known work, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) (see fig. 2), also known as *Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Demonstrating the Anatomy of the Arm*. Making a note of the character's anomalous appearance, Wall argues that Katie Armstrong's relationships to the paintings examined in Howard's class can easily be understood as one of the most exemplary views on art Smith offers (767). Indeed, while existing side by side with the multitude of attitudes towards Rembrandt represented in the novel, Smith nevertheless privileges Katie's personal hands-on approach already partly demonstrated by Claire's reaction to *The Shipbuilder and His Wife*. While entirely unnecessary to the plot development (Wall 767), Katie's introduction halfway through the novel provides an opportunity for an extended exploration into two of Rembrandt's painting, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1659) (see fig. 3) and *Seated Nude* (1631) (see fig. 4). A bright girl from a working-class family and attending Wellington on a full scholarship, Katie has dreamed about "one day attending a college class about Rembrandt with other intelligent people who loved Rembrandt and weren't ashamed to express this love" (*OB*, 250) ever since she can remember. Yet Howard's classes leave her none the wiser – despite attempting to decode Howard's terminology with a dictionary, Katie can rarely understand what he is saying.

When Howard talks of Rembrandt the painter, he is interrogating the cultural value of art. What makes Katie's approach exemplary is the way she is made to look at the paintings and see what it is that is worth evaluating in the first place. Demonstrating the centrality of the subjective perspective, Katie's inability to explain the battle of faith in *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* not only illustrates the limited scope of her experiences but also hints at the inherent qualities of aesthetic appreciation:

When she looks at the painting she sees a violent struggle that is, at the same time, a loving embrace. [...] This painting Katie finds impressive, beautiful, awe-inspiring – but not truly moving. She can't find the right words, can't put her finger on why that is. All she can say, again, is that this is not a faith battle she is looking at. At least, not of the kind she herself has experienced. (*OB*, 250-251)

That Katie studies the painting in minute detail looking up the relevant passages from the Bible speaks for her enthusiasm to find out what the painting means. Yet when it comes to explaining it, she is at a loss for words. Not being able to relate at a personal level, not having “experienced” a faith battle similar to the one depicted in the painting leaves Katie unmoved. This would suggest that to engage fully with art one needs to have a direct emotional response to it. However, even though the representation of Katie's response is curtailed by lack of experience, the appreciation of art does not end with personal concerns. Despite not fully understanding its contents, Katie's character nevertheless finds the painting beautiful. Moreover, her direct involvement with the picture is clearly underlined; Katie “looks” at the painting and “sees” it in a way that emphatically contrasts with Howard's attempt at “*interrogat[ing]* [...] the mytheme of the artist as autonomous individual with privileged insight into the human” (*OB*, 252, original italics). Unlike Barthes's figuration of the reader as a totalising theoretical construct, in *OB* the reader is entirely personal and subject to everything that has gone into constructing them.

The variety of perspectives to art represented by each of the characters illustrates well the difficulty of pinning down meaning and eschews whatever hierarchy there might be in the positioning of the author, text and reader. As we saw, the reader constructs meaning through interpretation and is always implicated in the interpretive process – each interpretation is informed by the self. The possibility of multiple interpretations on the other hand points to the multivalence of texts and the constant intertextuality of the textual field. Like Rembrandt's *Seated Nude* which reduces Katie to tears (*OB*, 251) while prompting Howard to despise the individualist author serving capitalist ends, the same image is able to produce endless reactions. However, while Smith no doubt privileges the personal reader as a producer of meaning as underlined by the centrality of Katie's character, we can nevertheless see glimpses of the author in Claire's appreciation of Rembrandt's genius, to say nothing of Monty's belief in the supremacy of authoritative figures. In addition to demonstrating aspects of intertextuality by representing the fluidity of meaning and the importance of the reader, Smith nevertheless seems to negotiate a more accommodating position within the intertextual framework by never wholly erasing the author's presence. Apart from the author, the next section will discuss the limitations of academic approaches to art through Howard's development as a spectator as well as considering the relationship between ethics and beauty and how they affect interpretation.

### **3.2.2 A new way of seeing**

As the novel's name already suggests, the relationship to beauty encapsulates the core of Smith's work. Where we see change and development on the level of the individual characters' approach to art is in the way in which Howard's role as a reader becomes subject to emotional response and changes from that of a "beautiful, inspired, bloody-minded schoolboy who came from

nowhere” (*OB*, 385) to that of a 57-year-old “emotional fraud” (*OB*, 203) with a broken marriage. Indeed, Howard’s underlined failings as an academic as well as a husband throughout the novel call for a close inspection of the role of beauty and the need to respond to it as a basis for personal ethics. Discussing the role of beauty in Smith’s novel, critics (Wall, Fischer, Lopez) have commented on the relationship between the social representation of beauty, that is art, and the response to it and how that serves as an indicator of personal morality. Kathleen Wall argues exemplarily that the adult Howard’s inability to engage with art on a personal or aesthetic level is linked directly to his inability to attend to the humanity of others, most of all to his wife Kiki. Interestingly, Wall also makes extensive use of another of Smith’s inspirations (see *OB*, acknowledgements), Elaine Scarry’s essay *On Beauty and Being Just*, which offers useful insights into aesthetics. As we will see, Howard’s development as a spectator in *OB* speaks for the relevance of personal engagement with art as Smith equates ethics with a sincere appreciation of beauty and through Howard forges a complex dialogue which considers the importance of the individual’s interpretation without forgetting the ever-present figure of the author.

Howard as a schoolboy is amazed by art. The momentary image the reader receives of young Howard and his relationship to painting juxtaposes his past and present selves and serves to highlight the discrepancy between the emotive nature of art and the theoretical responses to it. Being introduced to Rembrandt’s painting *The Syndics of the Clothmakers’ Guild* (1662) (see fig. 5) for the first time, Howard is forced into an eye-locking battle with it:

How many times had Howard looked at these men? The first time he was fourteen, being shown a print of the painting in an art class. He had been alarmed and amazed by the way the Staalmeesters seemed to look directly at him, their eyes (as his schoolmaster put it) ‘following you around the room’, and yet, when Howard tried to stare back at the men, he was unable to meet any of their eyes directly. Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard. (*OB*, 384-5, original italics)

The young Howard's instant reaction to the painting is simply to stare at it. The iterations of the act of looking present Howard's attempt to converse with the painting all the while intimating the reciprocity of interpretation: you look at the painting, the painting looks at you. What comes naturally to the schoolboy is something that the older Howard seems to have forgotten. In Elaine Scarry's terms, the act of staring is "the simplest manifestation of [...] the requirement beauty places on us to replicate" (5). If beauty, as Scarry explains, continually prompts a copy of itself, whether in the form of a painting or a poem or a description, simply to look is a part of the replication process as it instantiates the desire to continue seeing (4-5). That Howard as a schoolboy desires to converse with the painting suggests a more immediate and responsive relationship with beauty than the hackneyed academic expresses in his later capacity as an art historian. Thus, the emphatic focus on seeing and looking foregrounds the importance of aesthetic experience and serves as a link to personal ethics.

The young Howard's relationship to Rembrandt once again brings us back to the author. Despite the fact that the primary focus in the act of looking is on the spectator's relationship with the art object, the passage above nevertheless illustrates that the idea of the author is never fully obliterated. The reciprocity suggested by the Staalmeesters' steady gaze on Howard as he tries to meet their eyes implicates the painter as a force, or perhaps more fittingly as a mediator, between the subject matter and the spectator, pronouncing his own involvement in the stares of the gentlemen who so insistently look out of the painting. Yet there is nothing in the passage that would suggest the primacy of the author; in fact, Smith's representation of a two-way spectatorship speaks for a fluid exchange of signification between the reader and author. True to the postmodern creed the novel espouses, the author is never there to bring stability to



interpretation. The Staalmeesters keep to their perpetual smiles, and just as their eyes evade Howard's, so does meaning evade any fixity he might try to impose on it.

Leaving the adolescent art critic to his pictures, we can see how Howard's later development as a spectator figures in close relation to his development as a self-reflective individual finally becoming aware of the humanity of others. The erosion of academic rigour hinted at by the increasing impact of personal realities represents a transformation in the way Howard reacts to beauty. When he holds taster sessions on Rembrandt for the Wellington students, Howard blindly points at a reproduction of Rembrandt's *Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Demonstrating the Anatomy of the Arm* without bothering to look at it – unlike Katie Armstrong, “[he] had seen it so many times he could no longer see it at all” (*OB*, 144). However, as his affair with Claire comes out and his marriage teeters on the verge of collapse, the painting becomes starkly relevant: “But today Howard felt himself caught in the painting's orbit. He could see himself laid out on that very table, his skin white and finished with the world, his arm cut open for students to examine” (*ibid.*). Howard's usual academic “shtick” designed to impress his students fails when the prospect of Kiki leaving him becomes real. Instead, Howard is made to identify with the lifeless cadaver, the object of medical curiosity in the painting that he is compelled to look at probably for the first time in years. Wall (771) associates Howard's subsequent reaction of turning away from the painting and “back to the window” (*OB*, 144) as a turning away from beauty and from the power of Rembrandt's paintings to evoke self-reflection. Yet it is perhaps worth noting how Howard's precursory engagement with Dr Tulp's Anatomy Lesson nevertheless signals a change in the way he looks at art and prefigures the disturbing consequences of unethical behaviour. After all, as Howard turns his back on the painting he suddenly spots the figure of his daughter through the window and experiences “an odd parental

rush” (*OB*, 145), almost as if the emotions he brings to the painting are carried beyond it and beyond Howard himself. Thus, as habituation gives way to feeling, theory is replaced by aesthetic subjectivity and we get a sense of the possibilities that lie beyond university walls and the thick barricades of the unresponsive self.

Despite the centrality of Rembrandt in the novel, beauty does not stop with art. This is demonstrated in the way in which the central relationship between Kiki and Howard is a social equivalent of the relationship Howard has to painting. In addition to representing the beautiful, Kiki anchors the intersubjective significance of ethical actions to the social word while illustrating the primacy of seeing and looking as vital parts of engaging with beauty. Kiki’s own beauty is regularly commented on particularly by the women characters. To Claire, Kiki represents a new type of woman:

Claire remembered when Howard first met his wife, back when Kiki was a nursing student in New York. At that time her beauty was awesome, almost unspeakable, but more than this she radiated an essential female nature Claire had already imagined in her poetry – natural, honest, powerful, unmediated, full of something like genuine desire. A goddess of the everyday. (*OB*, 227)

The “goddess” with “unspeakable” beauty, Kiki still after a quarter of a century invites comment from Claire who thinks “[she] should be in a fountain in Rome” (*OB*, 121). This frequent emphasis on Kiki’s appearance contrasts with Howard’s inability to see and attend to what is beautiful. Unlike the schoolboy who could not tear his eyes away from Rembrandt’s painting, Howard no longer desires the continuation of the beautiful which Scarry associates with the drive towards replication beauty places on us; instead he falls prey to the common error of no more recognising what was formerly held beautiful (5, 14).

As Wall (773) has noted, Howard’s refusal to understand that beauty has something to do with the human leads to his attempt to aestheticise his infidelity on account of Claire,

whose tiny and compact appearance is described as the opposite of Kiki's. After the affair comes out, Howard takes refuge in the proclivities of his sex: "It's true that men – they respond to beauty ... it doesn't end for them, this ... this *concern* with beauty as a physical actuality in the world" (*OB*, 207). Yet Howard's focus on the physicality of the beautiful object is in direct conflict with what Scarry cites as the long tradition of beauty being bound with generosity and truth (31). Emphatically not truthful and hardly generous, for Howard to reify beauty merely makes his actions hurtful and his behaviour socially unacceptable. Additionally, here too we can see the inadequacy of the rarefied language of academia as it seeks dominance over social and personal realities. Never one to abandon her forceful humanity, Kiki on the other hand does not for a moment hesitate to confront her husband and force the knowledge of his indiscretions and their consequences on him. Kiki's acknowledgement of the human aspects of beauty underlines Howard's failure to understand the aesthetics of truth and personal generosity and how they affect moral behaviour, thereby revealing the inadequacy of physical beauty Howard tries to evoke as a justification for infidelity.

Howard's final transformation implied already by his reaction to *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* is enacted in the novel's final scene as he attempts to give a talk entitled "Against Rembrandt" (116) to an expectant Boston audience. His career almost over and having forgotten his notes in the car, Howard's over-intellectual cynicism is replaced by what appears a transformative acknowledgement of past mistakes as Rembrandt's paintings come up one after the other on his power point presentation while the hackneyed academic can find nothing to say about them. The slideshow continues in silence: "People appeared: angels and staalmeesters and merchants and surgeons and students and writers and peasants and kings and the artist himself. And the artist himself. And the artist himself" (*OB*, 442). Having come to the

last image, Howard identifies it as *Hendrickje Bathing* (1654) (see fig. 6). Wall (744) notes on the fittingness of how language deserts Howard at the end; his jaded academic discourse is silenced as Howard alternately gazes on Kiki in the audience and Rembrandt's painting of his love, Hendrickje, in a new appreciation of the beauty they offer. Having been forced to look at Rembrandt's works in a way similar to his 14-year-old self, Howard again desires to continue seeing as "[h]e look[s] out into the audience once more and [sees] Kiki only" (*OB*, 443). As appreciation of beauty returns with the understanding and humanity it offers, so does the figure of "the artist himself". The insistent recurrence of Rembrandt's self-portraits not only suggests a level of self-reflection the middle-aged Howard lacked but also forces a new awareness of the mastery of the painter he previously rejected. The artist or author is perhaps not dead after all, but neither is the reader bound by his presence.

Through the characters' relationship with Rembrandt's works and particularly through Howard's development as a spectator, Smith enters into the Barthesian debate on "The Death of the Author" and demonstrates a thorough awareness of the dialectic between intended meaning and textual multivalency. As we saw, the emphasis on interpretation and personal experience illustrated by the multiple and often contradictory opinions on art proffered by different characters foregrounds the importance of the reader in Smith's humanistic vision, which can be paralleled with Barthes's notion of the reader as the point of origin in textual relations. However, as Howard's transformation from an inspired schoolboy to a middle-aged liar and a cheat suggests, Smith at the same time favours a somewhat traditional notion of art where its function is seen as morally uplifting and inspirational. Indeed, *OB* clearly proposes an outlook where beauty and art have the power to redeem. Supporting the conflation of art and morality, however, does not necessarily bring with it a traditionalist regard for artistic genius, at

least not in the sense conceived by Barthes. As the plainly satirical portrayal of Monty's views on the importance of the artist suggests, Smith's fictional involvement in the debate clearly privileges the reader, not the author. Yet to proclaim the death of the author once more would be to dismiss the recurring presence of Rembrandt in the novel altogether. As Howard's late transformation demonstrates, the artist is still present, though not as an autonomous agent but rather as a kindly reminder of the power of beauty.

#### 4. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to analyse Zadie Smith's novel *On Beauty* in the light of two different ways of conceptualising intertextuality, those of Gérard Genette and Roland Barthes. By engaging with intertextual theory we have not only been able to participate in an increasingly expanding field of study but also address its underlying problems and contradictions, hopefully with the result of creating a better understanding of some of the intricacies characterising the field. The discussion of Smith's novel has also led us to consider the importance of intertextuality as a theoretical concept, since it has enabled us to explore the sources crucial to the interpretation of *On Beauty* and, moreover, to demonstrate the effects of literary theory on contemporary literature. In addition to *On Beauty*, another novel that has figured strongly in the study is E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, which served as a starting point for analysis and made it possible to identify key features by way of comparison which established thematically relevant passages and elements. By discussing Forster's modern classic published at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century alongside Smith's contemporary work, we were also able to explore some of the changes in fiction that reflect the nigh on hundred years that separate the two writers. As we saw in chapter 2, the relationship between *Howards End* and *On Beauty* demonstrably benefited from the structuralist methods of exploring intertextuality offered by Genette, whereas in chapter 3 it was Rembrandt's role in *On Beauty* which yielded to a more postmodern approach that moves beyond intertextuality as mere influence and considers the problem of construing meaning in a multivalent network of textual relations.

On a more general level, chapter 2 interrogated the applicability of structuralist notions to the analysis of contemporary fiction as well as establishing how a direct comparative study between two works of literature can yield an understanding of thematically important

features. The identification of Forster's *Howards End* as an intertext for Smith's novel initiated an interpretative process which aimed at analysing the significance of the differences and similarities between the structure, diegesis and themes of the two novels. As a rewriting, Smith's novel presents transpositional practices which aim at moving the story into closer proximity with a contemporary audience. This was established by the introduction of issues such as race which are missing or do not find a satisfactory representation in *Howards End* or by reworking thematic elements to reflect more fully the contemporary concerns of today's society. In this respect, it is perhaps justified to talk of *On Beauty* as an updated rewriting of the Edwardian classic, since it displays similar plot points yet revises the original story enough to fit the demands of its audience. However, as became clear in chapter 2, the rich material unearthed by the comparison with Forster also suggests that *On Beauty* cannot comfortably be reduced to a mere *Howards End Redux*, which in turn implies the limitations of a structuralist approach.

By exploring Genette's notions of intertextuality, we established their usefulness for the study of the relationship between two related texts. Nevertheless, if we consider the scope of Smith's novel, we have to concede that as such Genette's notions of intertextuality seem to be in danger of missing larger concepts (not to say contexts) of literary works by concentrating only on comparative elements. The deep-rooted structuralism of Genette's contrastive study provides at best only what some might call a traditional literary interpretation, which in itself *is* valuable but does not alone constitute an interpretative project consistent with the concerns of contemporary literary theory. What it does provide, however, is an alternative and a concrete contrast to the poststructuralist dissemination of meaning that helps in understanding some of the consequent theoretical shifts that took place within the field. The relationship between *Howards End* and *On Beauty* is important precisely because it provided us with a point of departure from

which to develop the analysis and led to other, more ingrained relationships that proved equally useful in discussing the novel. What Genette left unanswered led us to consider taking into account also other notions of intertextuality.

As is clear from the above, the main aim of chapter 3 was to augment the view of intertextuality by demonstrating the effect of postmodern theory on Smith's writing. With this in mind, the chapter discussed the ideas presented in Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author", since Barthes was one of the first critics to address the production of meaning as independent of authorial intention and thus offered an exemplary path into poststructuralist thinking. Barthes's notions proved particularly useful since they offered us the reader as the focal point of our discussion: by attacking the author as a source of meaning Barthes deposits the reader as the destination where a text finds its unity. Accordingly, Smith's characters in *On Beauty* could be found to represent different attitudes towards the author-painter figure of Rembrandt that ranged from conservative author worship to multivalent textuality reminiscent of the Barthesian strand of intertextual theory. Exploring the figuration of Rembrandt in Smith's novel suggested the centrality of the viewer-reader to the novel's framework, and though Smith clearly privileges the reader as a producer of meaning, she also engages with the larger author versus reader debate by representing the academic contexts in which it arises.

What the exploration of author representations and Rembrandt also revealed was the importance of beauty in Smith's thematics. By interrogating the varying interpretive responses to Rembrandt's paintings displayed by the novel's characters, we were also able to trace some of the views on art Smith presents in her work. Indeed, as Howard Belsey's development throughout the novel suggested, *On Beauty* privileges an outlook of art as morally beneficent and inspiring, which squares well with traditional notions of art's moral and



educational role. Yet, while relying on a traditionalist view of art, Smith is nevertheless able to move beyond this view of the artist as genius and side herself more with the Barthesian reader as swim in a web of intertextuality, always faced with the possibility of new, highly personal interpretations. Of course, siding with the reader does not automatically discredit the author; the recurring figure of Rembrandt in *On Beauty* ensures the modern scriptor finds a firm place as a mediator of aesthetic pleasure in the quest for meaning. As the existence of the traditionalist role of art side by side with the postmodern reader shows, synthesis is possible. This study has hopefully also come to illustrate the interdependence of structuralist and poststructuralist theories of intertextuality which allows for a similar synthesis of the traditional and the postmodern and opens up a productive space for the discussion of literature.

If we consider the broad field of intertextual studies as they appear between the covers of textbooks, we soon realise we have only scratched the surface of a complex and not always very transparent theoretical field. Therefore it would have been tempting to conduct a more in-depth study into the writings of other critics apart from Genette and Barthes who have contributed to the field in order to offer wider perspectives into what intertextuality is. Particularly interesting would be to develop Barthes's notions further and explore them in relation to the constitutive elements of deconstruction especially in the light of Derrida and Foucault's writings and demonstrate how fundamentally these three critics have contributed to the poststructuralist construction of intertextuality. At the same time, while the theoretical side of intertextuality has certainly proved worth exploring, it might also benefit from a wider application to literary works particularly in its poststructuralist forms. In addition to intertextuality, what we have only tangentially approached in this study are questions of art and painting and the fusion of verbal and visual domains. In discussing Rembrandt's paintings, we

have primarily engaged with their literary representations, not the paintings themselves, yet the different readings Smith presents in her novel have nevertheless allowed for an interesting exploration of the nature of art and its significance. To further examine the relationship between the verbal and the visual might easily yield fresh perspectives to the study of literature and painting alike.

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## Appendix



**Figure 1** *Portrait of Jan Rijcksen and his Wife, Griet Jans (The Shipbuilder and his Wife)* (1633), oil on canvas, 114.3 x 168.6 cm

(The Royal Collection, London)



**Figure 2** *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), oil on canvas, 169.5 × 216.5 cm

(The Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague)



**Figure 3** *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (ca. 1659), oil on canvas, 137 x 116 cm  
(Gemäldegalerie, Berlin)



**Figure 4** *Seated Female Nude* (ca. 1631), etching, 177 x 160 mm  
(British Museum, London)



**Figure 5** *The Syndics of the Clothmakers' Guild* (1662), oil on canvas, 191.5 x 279 cm  
(Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)



**Figure 6** *Hendrickje Bathing in a River* (1654), oil on panel, 61.8 x 47 cm  
(National Gallery, London)