UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

STRUCTURES OF FEELING IN ALI SMITH`S SEASONAL TETRALOGY

MA thesis

Grete Pärn

Supervisors: Prof. Raili Marling (PhD), Research Fellow Eret Talviste (PhD)

TARTU

2022

ABSTRACT

According to Raymond Williams a literary work has the potential to serve not just as an artwork valued for its creativity and aesthetics, but also as a record of its time, communicating the common human experience of the present moment of a particular time and place in history. This thesis analyses the seasonal tetralogy – *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), *Spring* (2019) and *Summer* (2020) – by Ali Smith as an example of such a record of the present. The four novels are set in the United Kingdom after the Brexit referendum which took place in June 2016 and represent the immediate effect of the referendum on the society as well as the individuals. This thesis analyses how the seasonal tetralogy represents the post-referendum United Kingdom by combining Raymond Williams' concept of *structures of feeling* and contemporary affect theories developed by Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Ben Anderson and others. This thesis will consider the sense of change, the sense of division, and the sense of hope as structures of feeling present in the four novels analysed here.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In autumn 2016, Ali Smith published *Autumn*, the first novel of what has come to be called her ‘seasonal’ tetralogy. Commonly also categorised as ‘Brexit’ novels, the tetralogy is set in the post-referendum United Kingdom and reflects the society of that particular place and time. Brexit was not just a historical event, but also one that was accompanied by conflicting emotions. While there were many expressions of these emotions in the news media, their contradictions and ambiguity called for literary representations, like Smith’s novels. In this thesis, I am going to analyse these novels in the light of Raymond Williams` notion of structures of feeling and affect theory to show how fiction can represent the present and thus serve as a system of communication that has the potential to overcome societal division.

Brexit is an almost textbook example of social division. On June 23, 2016, a referendum was held in the United Kingdom in order to decide whether the UK was going to leave or remain in the European Union. With 51.9 per cent of the electorate voting to leave the European Union and 48.1 percent voting to remain, a process commonly known as 'Brexit' followed (Clarke et al 2017: 29). The UK is the first member state to have left the EU since its official establishment with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Hobolt 2016: 1260). What makes the event even more important is that the UK was among the first members to join the European Community (predecessor of the European Union, founded in 1973) in 1975 after a public referendum confirmed the decision (Clarke et al 2017: n.p.).

Although as a political event, Brexit primarily impacted foreign politics, international trade as well as domestic economy, the prominence of the talk of shock and a divided nation in the aftermath of the referendum suggested that Brexit had also revealed personal, affective and cultural issues within the British society (Heidemann 2020: 677). Discussing the immediate reaction in the aftermath of the referendum, Zadie Smith (2016: n.p.) points out

that the society was shocked after the referendum because the scale of change that the process of Brexit threatened to bring about was vast. The 'Leave' vote also had a deeply symbolic meaning as it revealed a deep societal gap in Britain in terms of class, status, wealth and race, as well as between the metropolitan areas and the rest of the country (Smith 2016: n.p.). As pointed out by Janine Hauthal (2021: 297, 300), the referendum and the preceding campaign sparked discussions about post-factual and post-truth politics, but also anti-immigration and xenophobic sentiments, as well as the past imperial glory and nationalism. Analysing the contrasting of the British Self with the European Other in a speech given by Prime Minister Theresa May, Hauthal adds that one of the common motives for Leave voters was British Euroscepticism. The roots of this attitude lie in a perceived cultural exceptionalism which then becomes "an expression of national identity" (Hauthal 2021: 303).

National identity is very complex in the case of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the UK) because it consists of four countries – England, Scotland and Wales – collectively also referred to as Great Britain (GB) – and Northern Ireland, as well as many smaller islands. Great Britain was formed in 1707 when the Acts of Union joined England, Scotland and Wales. In 1801, GB and Ireland were joined to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. However, what was then the Irish Free State, now the Republic of Ireland, gained independence from the UK in 1922, after which the United Kingdom consists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Hall 1999: 6). Great Britain became a major colonial power starting from the 18th century, occupying colonial possessions in the Americas, Africa and Asia. At the height of its power, the British Empire covered over 20% of the world. As a result of anti-imperial independence movements in the various countries that the British Empire had colonised and exploited the empire gradually disintegrated in the aftermath of the Second World War.

This complex history helps to explain challenges to identity construction in the contemporary UK. The British cannot be considered a single unified nation in terms of a common ethnic background or cultural heritage (Hall 1999: 6). The roots of a British nationality lie in the former British Empire, the memory of which still remains a source of national pride and a sense of imperial nostalgia for many. After the collapse of the British Empire, however, the British identity had to find a balance between the English and Scottish, Welsh and (Northern) Irish culture (Hall 1999: 6). If a nation as an imagined community requires a shared sense of a nation, heritage, and symbols, then there is an inherent problem in the attempt to create a British identity because it functions as an umbrella term that cannot accommodate all the different national identities existing under it equally. This complication helps to explain why nostalgia for the empire, when national identity was clearer, characterises the experience of the post-referendum United Kingdom discussed in this thesis.

The situation is further complicated by the post-imperial immigration of people from former colonies and increasing multiculturalism in the UK. The identity trouble is not just limited to British identity but also the UK's relationship with the rest of the world, especially the EU, as could be seen in the pre-Brexit rise of Eurosceptic and xenophobic sentiments. It is my suggestion that the complex workings of identity within the UK in relation to its former colonies, European neighbours, and national identities in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales all contributed to Brexit. In a sense, Brexit can be seen as an attempt to reinforce the British national identity, which some perceive as having been weakened after the collapse of the Empire and integration into the European Union.

National identities are performed through practices of everyday life (Antonsich 2020: n.p.). Thus, a nation as a community could be seen as being a part of what Raymond Williams names the 'social' culture, one component of a structure of feeling, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. Cultural values are expressed in everyday behaviour, but

also in institutions and art, for example (Williams 1965: 57). That is, the shared ideas and values related to a nation as a community bind individual people through a sense of national identity (Hall 1999: 4). Brexit revealed a deep gap in values between different segments of British population and thus also the inner instability of British national identity. It was increasingly difficult to see what could bind the people who held conflicting values into one unitary community.

The importance of a community, as well as the issue of division within a nation, is also reflected in a motto "COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY" from *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, evoked in *Autumn* (Smith 2017: 17). It might be said that a community provides the individual member with an identity. The stability is derived from the knowledge of belonging to a community sharing common values and national feelings. As these shared common values are associated with strong emotions, I want to emphasise the importance of the affective aspect in the following chapters.

The trope of a "divided nation", according to Heidemann (2020: 677), became prominent in the media following the referendum. This sense of division led to academic analyses but also artistic responses that followed soon after the referendum. In addition to Ali Smith`s *Autumn* (2016), the first novel of the tetralogy analysed in this thesis, there were other Brexit novels such as *The Cut* (2017) by Anthony Cartwright and *Middle England* (2018) by Jonathan Coe, all reflecting on the event and its aftermath. Ali Smith followed the first novel with an additional three, creating a seasonal tetralogy that traces the impact of Brexit.

The prominence of such novels has made scholars such as Kristian Shaw (2018: 28) consider Brexit fiction, sometimes also called "BrexLit", as a phenomenon of its own. Harald Pittel (2018: 58-60) states that although the novels which could be categorised as Brexit fiction have been written both before and after the referendum, they generally tend to be

concerned with contemporary Britain, exploring British identity, as well as the fractured and conflictual societal state. Pittel also claims that the novels tend to be written from an English perspective, often overlooking not just the European point of view, but also that of the rest of Great Britain. Hauthal (2021: 312, 313) adds that Brexit novels illustrate various responses to Brexit, both in terms of literary genres as well as on a societal level, attempting to reflect on the sense of division at the time of the referendum in Britain. In these novels Brexit emerges as a phenomenon producing affects, political decisions and changes. Indeed, one of the common tendencies of Brexit novels, as stated by Hauthal (2021: 314), is that they embrace change rather than continuity.

Alternatively, Brexit novels have been considered as belonging to the longer tradition of the "condition-of-England" novels. David M. Jones (2019: 93) argues that English fiction has already been reflecting on the "condition" of the country for a long time. Heidemann (2020: 677) adds that while Brexit might have highlighted it, the fiction over the last century has been hinting at a broader issue of division within the country. Heidemann (2020: 677, 680) focuses particularly on the division between the rural and urban areas in post-imperial Britain, and not just in terms of the demographic analysis of the referendum results, but also a nostalgia linked to the countryside, which used to be a part of certain pastoral and idyllic imagined community, as well as various modes of Othering deriving from the imperial self-image. Considering Brexit fiction from the perspective of postcolonial fiction, John McLeod (2020) similarly suggests that the prevalent themes of Brexit fiction, including imperial nostalgia and xenophobia, were already noticeable in the works written before the referendum. Postcolonial novels could provide the post-referendum Brexit novels with historical background (McLeod 2020: 608, 610, 619). I will return to this idea in the context of the seasonal tetralogy later in this thesis in the empirical chapter.

Scholars discussing Brexit novels stress their immediacy. According to Richard Kelly (2018), despite the attempt of realist novelists to speak of, or for, their times, it is already due to the time it takes to write and publish a novel that real-life events find coverage – or reflection – in fiction only much later. In comparison to the 24/7 news that keep the public up to date with current world events, fiction has the benefit of freedom to explore conflicts and complicated emotions in depth, even when fiction is written fast, as many Brexit novels were (Kelly 2018: 74-78).

Yet Brexit novels are not just representations of "politics in novels" (Wally 2019: 64), but also texts of literary merit. Alex J. Calder (2019: n.p.) calls the seasonal tetralogy that the present thesis focuses on a "significant literary experiment that responds to events in current British politics and deploys polyvocal narrative techniques to explicate the role of art in perceiving contemporary reality". Calder notes how the fragmented style of narration works to slow down the otherwise tumultuous and frantic events around the referendum, allowing for a moment of reflection on intersubjective relationships amidst the sense of deep division (Calder 2019: n.p). The post-referendum Brexit novels that appeared soon after the referendum might have been seen as a starting point of the cultural analysis of the referendum and its aftermath (Kelly 2018: 74-78).

While Brexit is the main agent of change, it is the bodily human beings, affected by their surrounding environment, that form the centre of the tetralogy. *Autumn* (2016) focuses on the friendship between two characters, Elisabeth Demand and Daniel Gluck. The main story is set in the UK immediately after the Brexit referendum. The public reaction to the referendum, as well as the societal division it highlighted, serve as the background of the main plot. In addition, *Autumn* includes the themes of climate change and the societal role of art which run through all four parts of the tetralogy. Continuing in the post-referendum UK, *Winter* (2017) introduces the sisters Iris and Sophia, the latter's son Arthur, and Lux, who

pretends to be Arthur`s girlfriend. *Spring* (2019) has two main storylines. The first centres around Richard Lease, a film director, but also the father of Elisabeth from *Autumn*, and his deceased friend, screenwriter Patricia (Paddy) Lease. The second storyline is about Brittany (Brit) Hall, working at a detention centre for migrants after the Brexit referendum. Finally, *Summer* (2020) introduces Sascha and her brother Robert, but also connects the characters from the previous parts of the tetralogy to the story world. The timeline of *Summer* includes the beginning of COVID-19. Despite the number of characters and their different experiences, the prominent themes connecting the novels are division, change and hope, all commonly experienced and felt by the characters. Regarded as structures of feeling of the post-referendum UK, the focus of my analysis will be on these three themes throughout the tetralogy. Instead of doing a thorough close reading of all four novels, the focus will be on the tetralogy as a whole.

Smith`s tetralogy has several connections to her earlier work. Smith`s works have previously been analysed from a feminist and an ecocritical perspective. Many authors, such as Tove Conway (2021: 107), Justyna Kostowska (2015: 2), and Mary Horgan (2016:164) have named experimentation with narrative perspective and fragmented storytelling as characteristic of Smith`s feminist aesthetics and style. Conway (2021:107) notes that in experimenting with style and breaking literary boundaries, for example using modern feminist art in the seasonal tetralogy, Smith aims to draw a connection between real life and art, as well as a sense of borderlessness.

In addition to these stylistic features, the particularity of Smith's word choice has also been emphasised. Drawing parallels between Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson and Ali Smith, Kostkowska (2013) has highlighted the ecological consciousness of the authors which can be seen in the choice of themes, style and use of language. More specifically, Kostowska describes the word choice of Smith as "microcosmically particular", contributing to a

relationally systemic worldview, as well as allowing the reader to see the nonhuman nature as not just a setting or a symbol, but a character of its own (Kostkowska 2013: 107, 146). Similarly, Martin Ryle (2009: 8,11) has noted how the choice of epigraphs and words in the works record and comment on the denial of facing an ecological crisis, but also how the eco-political themes common in the works of the author are expressed by an urgent temporality.

The "microcosmically particular" is also examined in the seasonal tetralogy to create the structures of feeling of the post-referendum United Kingdom. My attention will be on the particular human character experiencing the effects of a wider political event, Brexit. In *Winter* (Smith 2018: 317), it is stated that the difference between politics and art is that in politics, the human always surfaces, while in politics, the human has to be absent or repressed. Similarly, the central emphasis of this thesis is on the human being, not politics.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how the seasonal tetralogy represents the structures of feeling characterising the post-referendum United Kingdom. The first chapter develops the theoretical basis for the analysis by examining the concept of structures of feelings, first as originally understood by Raymond Williams and then as complemented by the contemporary affect theorists. The second chapter provides the analysis of the seasonal tetralogy and is divided into three subchapters based on the prominent structures of feeling of the post-referendum United Kingdom: the sense of change, the sense of division, and the sense of hope. The key findings are summarised in the conclusion of the thesis.

STRUCTURES OF FEELING

Raymond Williams first used the notion of structures of feeling in his *Preface to Film* (1954) and developed it further in his later works. The concept is directly linked to Williams' understanding of "culture". In this thesis, "culture" is mainly understood through Ben Anderson (2014: 110) for whom culture is a structured signifying mechanism which frames and mediates our immediate, unthought experience of the world.

The structuredness of culture is also important for Williams. In *The Long Revolution* (1965), Williams distinguishes between three levels of culture – the lived culture which can fully be experienced only by those living at the time, the recorded culture which includes both facts and art, and the culture of the selective tradition. The latter, as explained by Williams (1965: 66), is necessary as one cannot have read every example of literature from a certain time period but has to make a selection upon which to draw their conclusions about the time.

In addition to the three levels, Williams also distinguishes between three categories of culture. Firstly, there is the 'ideal', in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, suggesting that there are certain absolute or universal values towards which a person can strive. Secondly, there is the 'documentary' where culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work in which human thought and experience are variously recorded. Thirdly, there is the 'social' culture, which describes the life, with values being expressed in art and learning but also in institutions and everyday behaviour (Williams 1965: 57). For Williams, the goal of cultural analysis is to discover the patterned organisation consisting of the relationships of and between the three categories and levels. Williams (1965: 63-65) suggests using the term "structure of feeling" to describe this organisation.

While already in *The Long Revolution* (1965: 64) Williams describes the structures of feeling as "the particular living results of all elements in the general organisation" which characterises a certain time period, the concept is developed further in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). There Williams starts by arguing that discussing culture and society in the past tense, in effect constantly converting the human experience into finished and wholly formed products, limits the understanding of the forming cultural experience of the living human. Williams distinguishes between the social, which is always discussed as something past and fixed, and the personal, which is the present, moving and subjective. He states that the living experience consists of various complex aspects which cannot be reduced to generalisations and the fixed social forms are not enough to form a social consciousness, since the forms can only become the practical consciousness as they are actively lived and related.

To describe the human experience in process, Williams suggests a more flexible term such as "the feeling" in order to clearly distinguish it from more formal and fixed concepts like "thought", "world-view" or "ideology". Calling the structures of feeling "social experiences in solution", Williams (1977: 133) explains that the *feeling* stands for the affective, coming from an impulse, that which is currently felt. Williams (1977: 132) describes the *affective* as follows: "Not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind". This practical consciousness is actually and actively lived instead of a mere idea of living. The *structure* describes the aspect of the relatedness of those feelings, but also the still-forming social experience. The latter, as noted by Williams, is initially usually perceived as a private and personal experience but it already has connected and recognisable characteristics which become apparent in later analysis. Therefore, the aim of using 'structures of feeling' as cultural hypothesis is to

understand the previously mentioned cultural elements and their connections in a certain place and time period. (Williams 1977: 128-133).

With the rise of affect theory and the increasing interest in the human experience and emotions, there is a newfound interest in the concept of structures of feeling. As stated by Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup (2015: 2), the idea originally developed by Williams decades ago has become relevant due to the cultural turn towards the body, as well as the move towards a more nuanced historical description in terms of the human experience. In their book, Sharma and Tygstrup (2015: 2) focus on the potential use of affect studies in contemporary cultural studies. The authors emphasise that Raymond Williams` contribution to the writing of cultural history lies in him adding the layer of affective infrastructure to the analysis of "the social and material infrastructure of reality" (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015: 2). Williams did this by charting not just the events and ideas characterising a cultural impact, but also the "less tangible qualities making up a specific social and intellectual atmosphere", for example common political beliefs, generational experience, body language and linguistic habits (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015: 1). Sharma and Tygstrup suggest returning to the original concept developed by Williams and complement it with the contemporary understanding of affect. A renewed application of "structures of feeling" in cultural studies could provide an understanding of what Sharma and Tygstrup summarise as "a participant`s perspective on culture" and history (2015: 1). Such a participation, or an individual experience of the present moment, however, cannot be fully grasped without the consideration of affect. This is the most significant contribution of affect theory to cultural analysis, and also the reason why in this thesis, I am using the combination of Williams` original concept and contemporary affect theory for the analysis of Ali Smith`s seasonal tetralogy.

In this thesis, I am going to use the term "affect" generically, "as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings

that get historically constructed in a range of ways" (Cvetkovich 2012: 4). Here, it is important to emphasise that the focal point of the study is the experiencing body. Despite being closely related, affects are not considered as synonymous with emotions (Schaefer 2019: 48). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2004: 45) clarifies the difference between "affect" and "emotion" by stating that affects are produced in the process of the circulation of signs. Instead of affect residing in the sign, or a physical item itself, signs can evoke emotions – defined as feelings of bodily change by Ahmed – in the experiencing body upon an encounter with another body or thing. The central focus of Ahmed`s book is on the effect of emotions on individual and collective bodies, as well as how language affects emotions.

Among other things, Ahmed also discusses how emotions shape the collective bodies into nations and "the others". What Ahmed calls national love sticks individuals together to form nations. Considering love as an affective bond, it involves an individual becoming aligned to a collective through an identification with an ideal. This identification, according to Ahmed, is a form of love which "moves or pulls the subject towards another" (Ahmed 2004: 125). In the context of nationality, the idea of a nation could be seen as this ideal, through which an individual can identify themselves with the collective to form a body of a nation. In contrast, "the others", in this thesis mostly the immigrants in the UK, are seen as failing this ideal, and are identified as the "source" of negative feelings such as hate, pain, disgust and fear (Ahmed 2004: 5,1). Therefore, Ahmed`s project emphasises the importance of attending to emotions and affects related to politics, especially to creating the imagined community of the nation.

According to Sharma and Tygstrup (2015: 5), the original concept of Williams not only highlights the importance of an affective structure of life, but also the need to recognise the immediate and emergent present moment. The latter point is emphasised by Matthews

(2001: 184) who states that this contemporaneity requires an appropriate form of analysis. A present moment should not be considered as fixed due to it being still unfinished, constantly changing and progressing. Lauren Berlant (2011: 4) states in a similar vein that: "the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else, such as an orchestrated collective event or an epoch on which we can look back". Instead of immediately being a fixed object, the present of any historical moment is first felt by the experiencing participant (Berlant 2011: 79). Alternatively, it can be said that the moment centres around affect as experienced by a particular human body which is why I am applying affect theory to the analysis of the "present moment" of the post-referendum United Kingdom reflected in the seasonal tetralogy.

In her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011:2), Berlant considers the post-Second World War United States and Europe through the notion of a "cruel optimism" – an attachment to an idea of something, for example food, a type of a romantic love or a political situation, which represents a promise of happiness, but is in reality an obstacle to reaching the desired happiness. This is also related to the fantasy of a "good life", representing moral, intimate or economic success, which however is impossible for many and thus ends up being an obstacle to people actually experiencing happiness (Berlant 2011: 2). Both of these concepts are imagined and affective, but also depend on the exclusion of that which lies outside the "good", which is a part of why Berlant calls for the reimagining of these objects.

Being concerned with a historical perspective, Berlant (2011: 4) also argues that the political impasses cannot be understood without the context of how the present is produced. Conceiving a "contemporary moment from within that moment" and a present as sensed, affective, and constantly changing before becoming anything historical, Berlant directly refers to Raymond Williams (Berlant 2011: 4). According to Berlant, Williams` structure of feeling is a "residue of common historical experience sensed but not spoken in a social

formation, except as the heterogeneous but common practices of a historical moment would emanate them" (Berlant 2011: 64, 65). Earlier in the book, Berlant also refers to Williams` concept to claim that it is centred around an atmosphere at a specific historical period which is collectively affectively shared, not an individual experience (Berlant 2011: 15). While the relationship between the individual and the collective was indeed important for the concept developed by Williams, the word "residue" used by Berlant does not fully convey the complexity of the feeling in the combination of the different levels and categories of culture, and their relations, as discussed by Williams. What both Williams and Berlant, an affect theorist with a much more contemporary understanding of affect and its role in politics, seem to agree on, is that the analysis of the affective present moment requires a fluid approach that is attentive to both history and affects. In considering the political present with its major social divisions, Berlant`s comment on politics being a scene "in which the drama of the distribution of affect/noise meets up with scenarios of movement" becomes especially significant. For example, it might be suggested that extreme othering, and the widespread negative affects such as hate that cause it, can eventually lead to "movement" in the shape of political decisions, directed against those considered as "the other" (Berlant 2011: 230). Attention to such affects felt within a present moment is crucial for the understanding of the workings of political decisions, and their consequences.

The concept of structures of feeling can be used in cultural and literary analysis to understand "the affective elements and their connections in a certain period" (Williams 1977: 128-133). Peschel (2012: 161) adds that the concept can lead to a better understanding of how these elements contribute to complex social changes, such as Brexit. Following the works of Williams, Ahmed and Berlant, I claim in this thesis that Smith's literature functions as a tool with which we can analyse the social world, particularly the structures of feelings and affects Brexit produced, while trying to decipher how different bodies (represented as characters in

Smith's fiction) experienced and contributed to these structures of feelings and affects. Anderson (2014: 113) suggests that the social is "an ordered phenomenon", with feelings, and moods, expressing "the ways in which the social is ordered". Therefore, even more specifically, literary analysis using the concept of structures of feelings provides us with an "environmental understanding of affects", as the focus of the analysis is "the contemporary condition in terms of a dominant emotion or set of linked emotions" (Anderson 2014: 105).

Structures of feeling in a work of art

In order to understand the use of art for analysing a certain time period, instead of for example a history textbook, it is, first, important to know that Williams (1965: 35) considers art an imitation of reality. As a record of its time, a literary work can include all levels and categories of culture discussed earlier, as well as their relationships and interconnections, similarly to a network. Williams himself applied his concept to an analysis of English popular fiction of the 1840s, identifying instability and debt as the two structures of feeling of the period of changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution (Williams 1965: 82). Williams` analysis serves as demonstration of how the concept might be methodologically used in literary analysis.

According to Filmer (2003: 201), structures of feeling in an artwork are created through "the imaginative interactional social and cultural practices of initiation and response" which reflect the practices of the community and society of the creator. Williams also considers art as a system of communication. In the process of such communication, the individual experience of the creator is shared through the medium, and turned into a common once it is received by the audience (Williams 1965: 38-39, 55). As an organised structure, Williams (1965: 51) claims, a piece of art can be used to describe and communicate what is

perceived as reality. In the same way, Ali Smith`s novels depict the structures of feelings and affects that Brexit either triggered or highlighted.

Sharma and Tygstrup (2015: 5) point out that there are two steps to finding the structures of feeling in a literary work. First, one must dissociate and itemise the different elements, or also micro-traits "revealing a state of emotional acuteness" (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015: 5) which eventually lead to the surfacing of the feeling. Second, one must associate these elements and figure out the configuration of an affect which these elements compose.

In looking for the "feelings", attention to aesthetics is particularly important because aesthetics are the cultural elements (next to institutions and historical legacy, among other things) that, according to Williams (1977: 133), can hint at the feelings and rhythms of its time. In *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (2015), Williams states that the feeling is located somewhere in the conscious comparison between the experience and what has been articulated by the author. That is to say that both what has been articulated in the text and the language used can become keys in locating the structure of feeling. Williams (2015: 168) sees all that has been left poorly articulated as implications of potential "disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble" which indicate major change "in the relation between the signifier and the signified, whether in literary language or conventions". The emotional tensions, or ongoing processes of changes in feelings reflected in fiction can, according to Williams (2015: 168) eventually lead to social changes in real life. This is why Williams suggests that the structures of feelings found in a literary text can offer clues to future social changes.

Affective national identity and structures of feeling

National identity and nationalism play a central role in the novels analysed in the present thesis and both are affective in many ways. Antonsich et al (2020: n.p.) highlight that rather than stand apart from other aspects of everyday life, the nation is always entangled in everyday spaces, but also the feelings, thoughts and practices of both an individual (citizen) and a group. All nations have highly emotional ceremonial events and holidays that generate a sense of togetherness and national belonging. Thus, it can be argued that both national identity more broadly and nationalism specifically are affective by nature. The constant presence in a moment points to affective nationalism as an important element of the structure of feeling of a specific place and time period.

Benedict Anderson (2006: 6) suggests that a nation could be defined as a political imagined community. While a community includes individuals with common characteristics, for example a place of birth, the current residence, ethnicity and language, Anderson (2006: 6) claims that it is imagined because the members do not know other members personally but still have an idea of a communion. The members of a nation also share similar emotions towards objects which have been granted national symbolism. For example, a flag in itself is a piece of fabric, which only becomes a national symbol, a sign loaded with affect, upon encounter with an individual who attaches a meaning to it. The more a flag as a symbol circulates, the more it comes into contact with other individuals, resulting in the flag becoming more affective. Saturated with nationalist affect, this is the object, often encountered in the common everyday life, towards which members of a nation direct their emotions (Ahmed 2004: 7, 9). Coming back to Ahmed's (2004: 11) idea of a "sticky object" that I referred to above, objects such as the flag might be considered as "sticky" because they are already historically linked to positive emotions, such as happiness and pride. Groups, such as a nation, are emotionally united through shared orientation of positive emotions

towards certain “sticky” objects, such as the flag (Ahmed 2010: 35). In that sense, it can also be stated that the bodies of nations are shaped through shared emotions. This emotional connection, or the lack of it, also allows for a distinction between an “us” – and “ours” – and “them” (Ahmed 2004: 10). “They” are not only perceived to lack the emotional attachment to the shared happy objects of one nation, but they can also be seen as a threat to what`s “ours”, associating them with negative emotions.

In view of the above, I argue that in order to understand the past political history, one should consider the everyday expressions of nationalism in that particular period. Among other places, this can be found in the literature of that time. Yet we also need to think of affective nationalism in a present moment since it is oriented towards the future. The progressive aspect, with change, movement, and fluidity instead of fixedness, is a crucial part of Williams` (1977: 133) original concept of structures of feeling. Antonisch et al (2020: n.p.) state that affective national feelings “have the potential to drive social and political engagement and activism”. I suggest that the potential in recognising the present lies in the very state of being yet-unfinished, still unfolding, making intervention possible. This stance could also open up the potential to envision the direction of the nation in new ways.

STRUCTURES OF FEELING IN THE SEASONAL TETRALOGY

In this chapter, I will use the conceptual framework developed above in the analysis of the various structures of feeling and affects of the post-referendum United Kingdom reflected in Smith`s novels, of which the most prominent are the sense of change, division, and hope.

1. CHANGE

Discussing Brexit novels, including the seasonal tetralogy, Hauthal (2021: 314) sees Brexit as the main agent of change in the post-referendum United Kingdom. Following Williams (1977: 133) and Berlant (2011: 4), the present can be viewed as a "living" experience that is first affectively felt and still forming, before becoming a "fixed" historical event. The state of formation makes the discussion of change also relevant in the context of "structures of feeling". Building upon that, in this subchapter, I am going to analyse how Smith conveys the sense of change.

First, I am going to discuss the changes brought on by the Brexit referendum, focusing on the immigrants in the UK becoming "the other". I am also going to explore how Smith draws parallels between changes in attitude towards "the other" as a prominent structure of feeling experienced in post-referendum Britain, during World War II and imperial Britain before the 20th century. With this, I am pointing to the existence of a perceivable pattern in these historical periods. Next, I am going to highlight other major agents of change, such as the climate crisis and COVID-19. All of these changes are affective for individuals represented in the novels and allow us to gain an understanding of the individual experiences of the literary present.

Brexit, insiders and outsiders

Describing the atmosphere in the United Kingdom a week after the referendum, it is stated in *Autumn* that: "…All across the country, everything changed overnight…" (Smith 2017: 61). The word "overnight" marks abruptness and a disruption of the order of daily life. The word "shock" was extensively used in the immediate aftermath of the referendum. According to Terri Seddon and Beatrix Niemeyer (2018: 758), the 'Brexit shock' shows the "inability to cope with an unexpected political decision and the evident helplessness when consequences cannot be foreseen in that moment of change". Prime Minister David Cameron did not believe that the majority would support leaving the EU and most of the polls also failed to correctly predict the result (Clarke et al 2017: n.p.). I am considering this shock in terms of a "moment of change", characterised by sudden helplessness and a sense of an unforeseen future. According to Ben Anderson (2014: 64), shock is "a point of suspense after environmental interventions have undone the subject but before the subject has been utterly destroyed". Anderson (2014: 65) adds that at that moment, the subject and their world experience are exploded. The referendum could be considered such an "intervention".

The tetralogy suggests that the people most significantly impacted by the changes that the Brexit vote brought were immigrants living in the UK. In *Autumn* which covers the immediate aftermath of the referendum we can find the following comment: "Elisabeth wonders what's going to happen to all the care assistants. She realizes she hasn't so far encountered a single care assistant here who isn't from somewhere else in the world" (Smith 2017: 111). While the UK was still in the EU, Europeans made up a significant proportion of the social care workers in the UK but their future status became uncertain after Brexit (Read and Fenge 2018: 677).

A similar sense of uncertainty can be seen in *Winter* (2018), as Lux, who is originally from Croatia, states that she can no longer get a good job because no one can be sure whether

she will still be allowed to be in the UK next year (Smith 2018: 247). The sense of an ongoing change is conveyed by the uncertainty about the future. As witnessed within a particular moment of *now*, change is related to both process and progress, as well as unfinishedness. These qualities are also reflected in the following quote from *Autumn*: "Here's an old story so new that it's still in the middle of happening, writing itself right now with no knowledge of where or how it'll end" (Smith 2017: 181).

Discussing the public reaction in the aftermath of the referendum, Zadie Smith (2016: n.p.) states that while change in itself is to be expected, the changes related to Brexit revealed an alarming division. There is an incident in *Autumn*, in which the words "GO HOME" have been painted on a cottage wall (Smith 2017: 53). This results in the response "WE ARE ALREADY HOME THANK YOU" later on in the novel (Smith 2017: 138).

No matter who the outsider is who is being sent home, the concept of "home", as well as one`s right to claim a physical space, such as a country, as their home is worth discussing here. Europeans might see themselves as being "home" within the whole EU. According to Hauthal (2021: 297, 300), the common motives for Leave voters were the British Euroscepticism, but also anti-immigration and xenophobic sentiments. As the result of Brexit, the immigrants in the UK become the othered foreigners, who are at least figuratively excluded from this "home". The topic of othering based on national identity is discussed further in the subchapter on division. However, the act of vandalism in the scene described above is relevant for this discussion on change because it is one of the many examples from the novels of how the attitude towards those believed to be outsiders perceivably changed, magnifying hate.

The Brexit referendum has a fixed date – 23 June 2016. Therefore, on the one hand, the change might be considered abrupt, leading to the shock experienced by many at this particular moment. In contrast, the Leave supporters` change of attitude towards the

immigrants, which indeed became more perceivable at the time of the campaigns and after the event itself, did not occur overnight. Rather, this changing attitude fuelled the referendum, and was, on the other hand, also fuelled *by*, or encouraged by the referendum result. I suggest that those graffiting GO HOME on a cottage wall were spurred by a change in permissible public expression that legitimated negative attitudes towards immigrants. This openly negative attitude is not new, but can be seen in other periods of British history as well

Repeating patterns of history

Changes represented in the seasonal tetralogy also reveal the repetitive nature of history. During an imagined dialogue between the 32-year-old Elisabeth and the 101-year-old Daniel, the two discuss *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley as follows:

"Oh, that old thing, he'd say.
It's new to me, she'd say" (Smith 2017: 31).

This interaction shows that themes – but also affects – recur throughout history. What is considered old by the century-old-man is experienced as new by the younger generation to which Elisabeth belongs. Within this closed circle, change is only a transition from one stage to another, repeating old patterns. Smith describes the perceived change towards nationality-based xenophobia at the time of Brexit, drawing parallels between the post-referendum UK, the British Empire and the Third Reich to reveal a pattern of historical affects. More specifically, the main similarities are in the polarization of "us" and "the other" discussed further in the subchapter about division. Knowing about the painful consequences of such feelings at the time of the British Empire and the Third Reich, the recognition of these parallels at the time of Brexit heightens fears about the potential repetition of nationalist violence. In this context, the following complaint over the apparent inaction of the government after the Brexit referendum in *Winter* is worth highlighting: "The people in this

country are in furious rages at each other after the last vote /…/ and the government we've got has done nothing to assuage it and instead is using people's rage for its own political expediency "(Smith 2018: 56). On the same page, the people in power are also claimed to both not know and not feel responsibility towards history, focusing on their personal gain instead (ibid). One way of reading this "responsibility" is remembering, and learning from, the past. As can be seen in a scene in which politicians threaten their opponents on national radio, politicians themselves are the people generating rage, not reducing it (Smith 2017: 197, 198).

Williams (1977: 132) has stated that changes can often be observed only after they have already happened. This resonates with a scene from *Autumn* in which Elisabeth listens to two spokespersons arguing on the radio: "It has become a time of people saying stuff to each other and none of it actually ever becoming dialogue. It is the end of dialogue. She tries to think when exactly it changed, how long it's been like this without her noticing" (Smith 2017: 112). Although the theme of communication, and dialogue is discussed further in the subchapter about hope, the attempt to locate the starting point of the change in the extract above is worth highlighting here. Elisabeth notes a change in terms of the dialogue between people having apparently ended. At that moment, she becomes aware of a change having already occurred. The affect underlying this change, however, might be considered intangible *somethings* in the air. The multitude of different elements, or, following Williams (1965: 66), the different levels and categories of culture, it is composed of – the long history of the UK, the personal history of the individual, the "everyday" life, the social norms, and emotions experienced by an individual, to name a few – structure Elisabeth`s experience of the present moment, but remain inarticulate until Elisabeth acknowledges the result in the form of the dialogue having ended. The reader recognises this lack of dialogue and the growing sense of xenophobia and othering as a potential repetition of the cycle already known from history. I

argue that this recognition results from attention to affects in the present moment. The qualities of being yet-unfinished, constantly changing and progressing as opposed to being fixed also mean that, if recognised and counteracted, there is still a potential to shape the collective body towards a change in a direction other than the historical cycle of hate-fuelled othering.

Experiencing the changing times from within a present moment

The theme of change is already inherent in the titles that are named after the seasons of the year. The transition from one season to another is often gradual, with the process itself going unnoticed until the "symptoms" – such as the leaves turning yellow in autumn or trees budding in spring – can be observed. It is also a normal, expected and also repetitive change that suggests historical continuity. Having previously discussed the repeating patterns of history, it is worth noting how the quote "politics is transitory" in *Winter* allows for parallels to be drawn between the changing seasons and political situation (Smith 2018: 59). However, as stated earlier, changes can also happen abruptly.

Besides Brexit, a number of other impactful ongoing changes are represented in the novels. This is hinted at in the following quote from *Summer*: "Things can change fast. They just do. The whole world's learning that lesson simultaneously right now, one way or the other" (Smith 2020b: 320). For example, *Summer* covers the 2019-2020 wildfires in Australia, which were boosted by climate crisis, explicitly describing the damages, such as charcoaled animals (Smith 2020b: 25). Although the wildfires happen in Australia, social media and 24/7 news let the emotional impact of these fires reach the rest of the world. *Summer* also sees the beginning of the COVID-19 era, which brings along even more devastating, impactful changes in everyday life. Both the climate crisis and COVID-19 are changes heavily loaded with negative emotions and accompanied by information overload

and affective overload. The effect of news coverage of emotionally triggering events is reflected in the following statement by the mother of Elisabeth in *Autumn*: "I'm tired of the news. I'm tired of the way it makes things spectacular that aren't, and deals so simplistically with what's truly appalling. /…/ I'm tired of being made to feel this fearful /…" (Smith 2017: 56, 57).

The change, thus, is not just about historical events, but how we process it. The realisation quote above comes after Elisabeth and her mother discover that a piece of common land has been privatised and surrounded with a razorwire fence. I will return to this example again in discussing division. Here, it is important to note that the news is identified as the source of a sense of tiredness, but also fear and frustration. This is visible via language as the phrase "I'm tired…" is repeated but also visible on a more bodily level, as the mother sits on the ground in this scene, demonstrating her exhaustion or a sense of sinking down.

Discussing pain, Ahmed (2004: 20) points out that in depicting landmines as the source of pain and suffering, the chain of events is ended too soon, since "landmines are themselves effects of histories of war", made and placed by humans. The landmines mentioned by Ahmed resemble the news in the extract above. The non-stop inflow of new information creates an affect of tiredness, exhaustion and frustration. New information exposes the consumer to constant interventions, with yet another change potentially requiring a re-orientation in the world as they understand it. Different types of media, such as television, the radio, social media, are present throughout the novels, heightening the potential of change. This can be seen in the following extract from *Autumn*: "Elisabeth skims the day's paper on her phone to catch up on the usual huge changes there've been in the last half hour" (Smith 2017: 137). A person today cannot escape this flood of change, even if it takes place abroad as often the processes are similar to each other, even if they take place in different countries. For example, as pointed out by Wally (2017: 64), the Brexit referendum

and the election of Trump in the USA both mark "a return of nationalistic and anti-intellectual populism". These parallels also appear in *Winter*, with focus on emotion. In comparing the polarization of people and the failure of the government to address the rage, Charlotte states that what is "happening in the United States is directly related" to the feelings in the post-referendum UK (Smith 2018: 56). The fear evoked by news of what is happening in the UK can be further intensified by news of the parallel events in the US. The emotional load of the news gets even heavier when adding news on the effects of climate crisis and COVID-19.

The issue is not just the flood of news but its presentation. Elisabeth's mother claims to be tired of the news dealing "simplistically with what's truly appalling" (Smith 2017: 56). Now, journalism, as noted by Kelly (2018: 75), "has to be fast and necessarily provisional". The amount, speed, and severity of the information leaves little time for analysis. This is illustrated by the following claim in *Winter*: "It's like walking in a blizzard all the time just trying to get to what's really happening beyond the noise and hype" (Smith 2018: 58). This quote refers to fake news, further contributing to the amount of "noise". This, however, is a slightly different issue which I will not be discussing in this thesis. What is important for the current discussion, however, is how this blizzard of messages of yet another change can figuratively slap an individual in the face and make it difficult to find their way in the middle of the world as actively experienced.

This subchapter has discussed the post-referendum United Kingdom reflected in the seasonal tetralogy as a place characterised by change. Global changes such as Covid-19, climate crisis, and Brexit all have a rather negative impact on the individuals in the tetraology. This negative impact is amplified by the 24/7 news cycle in which change comes across as a shocking and anxiety-producing, making it feel impossible to follow all of the changes happening in the world all the time. When shared by a larger community, these

affects and feelings begin to define a certain historical period and place. Focusing specifically on the aftermath of the Brexit referendum and the public expressions of hate towards the othered immigrants, the seasonal tetralogy revealed shock and a sense of uncertainty as the prominent affects and feelings of that period, intensified by historical knowledge of the potential consequences of extreme nationality-based division.

2. DIVISION

Changes also lead to different kinds of divisions, as depicted in Ali Smith's tetralogy. In the following, I will focus specifically on the level of political identity, the complexities of which were explained in the literature review.

The importance, as well as urgency, of the discussion of division in the post-referendum United Kingdom is strongly related to what has been seen as a potential negative effect of the referendum, as reflected in the following extract from *Autumn*:

> *All across the country,* there was *misery* and *rejoicing*. *All across the country*, what had happened whipped about *by itself* as if a *live electric wire* had snapped off a pylon in a storm and was whipping about in the air above the trees, the roofs, the traffic. *All across the country*, people *felt* it was *the wrong thing*. *All across the country*, people *felt* it was *the right thing*. *All across the country*, people *felt* they'd *really lost*. *All across the country*, people *felt* they'd *really won*. *All across the country*, people *felt* they'd done *the right thing* and other people had done *the wrong thing*. (Smith 2017: 59, emphasis mine)

This quotation, firstly, is a part of a three-page extract with all of the sentences starting with the phrase "all across the country". The repetition of the phrase creates an affective flow of contradictory responses to the referendum, stressing the spread of division. Secondly, the formation of two groups is clearly highlighted – one group is feeling a sense of misery about the result as "the wrong thing" and that they had "really lost", and the other group rejoices, feeling they had done the "right thing" and "really won" (Smith 2017: 59). What should also be highlighted here is the verb "feel", emphasising the importance of individual feelings, emotions and affects. Instead of right and wrong, good and bad being objective that the people "know", or something factual that simply "is", the word "feel" hints

at the two opposing views being only subjective opinions, and not the universal truth. Smith adds affective weight to the extract by using lengthy phrases, but also by emphasising the antonyms "won" and "lost" with "really". The extract ends as follows:

> All across the country, the country *split in pieces*. All across the country, the countries *cut adrift*. All across the country, the country was *divided*, a *fence* here, a *wall* there, a *line* drawn here, a *line* crossed there, a *line* you don't cross here, a *line* you better not cross there, a *line* of beauty here, a *line dance* there, a *line* you don't even know exists here, a *line* you can't afford there, a whole new *line* of fire, *line* of *battle*, end of the *line*, here/there. (Smith 2017:61)

These two quotes convey the sense of division both within the "country" as an institution, and the people in terms of interpersonal relationships. The sense of division is also linked to the sense of danger. This sense is conveyed through imagery, such a wall, a fence, a line, or even the slash symbol, the "battle". Furthermore, the societal break-up is conveyed through verbs phrases such as "split in pieces", "cut adrift" and "divided". The "live electric wire" that had "snapped" and was now "whipping about in the air" carries a sense of imminent danger.

"Us" vs "them": the UK vs Europe

The sense of division in the seasonal tetralogy can be understood through the concept of nation as an affective community. Ahmed (2004:10) suggests that "…it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the "I" and the "we" are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others". Similar emotions and responses to certain objects define the boundaries of a community, uniting individuals. In the context of a nation, such objects, which "become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed 2004: 11), are national symbols – flags, specific colour combinations, patriotic songs or physical spaces. While a nation as one`s own community can take shape through common objects of love, it might be said that the "others" are those who do not share these objects of love. According to Ahmed (2004: 1), the "others" can be perceived as a potential threat to that which is considered as "ours", and

therefore also as sources of negative feelings, hate being perhaps the most striking one. One example of the affectiveness of certain symbols is seen in a scene in *Autumn*, in which a swastika banner hung on a historical government building for a movie set in France in 2015, and which causes a shocked reaction from unknowing eyewitnesses, and consequent media coverage. The reaction is described as follows: "Some people screamed. There was a flurry of shouting and pointing" (Smith 2017: 63). This scene demonstrates how more than half a century after the end of the Third Reich, the swastika continues to evoke strong sense of shock and pain due to the historical memory of the deeds of the Nazi regime. Therefore, the stickiness – or on the contrary, the un-sticking – of certain objects that have acquired a great symbolic meaning might be seen as a mechanism of creating a community through affects and emotions.

Many instances throughout Ali Smith`s seasonal tetralogy touch upon otherness and national division. For example, *Spring* begins with an anonymous *We* saying the following:

> What *we* want is elected members of parliament saying knife getting heated stuck in her front and twisted things like bring your own noose *we want governing members of parliament in the house of commons shouting kill yourself at opposition members of parliament* we want *powerful people saying they want other powerful people chopped up in bags in my freezer* we *want muslim women a joke in a newspaper column* we want the laugh we want the sound of that laugh behind them everywhere they go. *We want the people we call foreign to feel foreign* we need to make it clear *they can't have rights unless we say so*. (Smith 2020a: 3,4, emphasis mine)

Smith has conveyed the hate speech coming from an angry crowd as an unstoppable stream of consciousness by using both brutal imagery and few punctuation marks, to create an intense atmosphere. Coming from the anonymous *We*, directed at a group of anonymous *Them*, the extract stresses the (ab)use of power and authority by the *We*. More specifically, the speakers declare that it is in their power to either grant or not grant rights to those labelled as foreigners. This also includes an apparent right to make decisions about the membership to the imagined community. In addition, the *We* clearly express the wish for these foreigners, or "others" to be publicly persecuted. It is striking that the speakers expect the described violent, discriminating actions from the authorities but also the media, represented by the newspaper

column above. There is another extract from *Autumn* in which the use of media, this time the national radio, is used as a platform for hate speech:

> *You lot are on the run and we're coming after you,* a right-wing spokesman had shouted at a female MP on a panel on *Radio 4* earlier that same Saturday. The chair of the panel didn't berate, or comment on, or even acknowledge the threat the man had just made. Instead, he gave the last word to the Tory MP on the panel, who used what was the final thirty seconds of the programme to talk about the *real and disturbing cause for concern* – not the blatant threat just made on the air by one person to another – of *immigration.* Elisabeth had been listening to the programme in the bath. She'd switched the radio off after it and wondered if she'd be able to listen to Radio 4 in any innocence ever again. Her ears had undergone a sea-change. Or the world had. (Smith 2017: 197, 198, emphasis original)

Once again, the threat from an anonymous *We* to those addressed as "you lot" in the phrase "You lot are on the run and we`re coming after you" above indicates not only an extreme division between the two imagined groups, but also the power and aggressiveness of the *We*. In regard to the media, including the British *national* radio as an authority, the incident in which the chair of the panel does not condemn the behaviour highlighted above can also be read as an indication of hate speech having moved from the private sphere to the public sphere. The right-wing spokesman points out that immigrants – in the broadest sense, without any specifications – are the "real and disturbing cause for concern". This is followed by a critical comment on the host ignoring "the blatant threat just made on the air by one person to another", and Elisabeth switching off the radio in apparent disbelief in response to that comment. The spokesman shifting the blame to the immigrants, as well as portraying them as a threat, strongly resonates with the discussion by Ahmed (2004:43) on hate as an emotion shaping collective bodies, perceiving the "other" as a threat to the wellbeing of the object of love. It might also be suggested that the genders of the speakers play a role here, as it is the right-wing spokesman, specifically identified as a man, shouting at a female MP. Smith emphasises the sexist behaviour by, paradoxically, using the gender neutral "person" in the phrase "by one person to another". Considering that the woman has often been treated as "the other" in feminist criticism, this extract might be read as a criticism of othering, endorsed on the national media, more broadly. Here, the "other" is no longer just the

immigrant, but also the female, stripped of the right of being a person deserving civil treatment.

So far in the discussion, I have often been referring to the polarised groups as *We* and *Them*, or the "other". While the statement by the right-wing spokesman seems to identify the "other" as immigrants, the following scene from *Autumn* points to a certain broadening of this othering. Elisabeth recounts an incident in which a Spanish couple who had just arrived for a holiday in the country was screamed to "Go back to Europe" and "This isn't Europe" (Smith 2017: 130). As the UK was a member state of the EU for nearly fifty years, the phrase "This isn't Europe" is striking. Yet, Hauthal (2021: 303) states that the British have long contrasted the British Self and the European Other. Indeed, hate speech directed at tourists instead of the immigrants points to a degree of confusion as to the identity of the "other". Whereas the Leave party focused their negative sentiments on immigrants, this extension to tourist indicates an extension of "the other" to all foreigners.

The scene described above also notably features bystanders who try to interfere. This intervention, like the criticism of the radio discussion above, indicates that although hate speech may have become more accepted in the public sphere after the Brexit referendum, this sentiment is not universal. Elisabeth responds to the incident with the Spanish couple affectively: "All the same Elisabeth sensed that what was happening in that one passing incident was a fraction of something volcanic. This is what shame feels like, she thinks" (Smith 2017: 130). Here, shame is directly stated as being as an affect linked to nationalist feelings. Smith adds an affective reference to the volcano to emphasise her point about the volatility of emotions. However, Smith leaves the person feeling shame unclear: it could be the Spanish people, the narrator, or even possibly the nationalist screamers.

Autumn shows "a bunch of thugs" sing-shouting "Rule Britannia" in the street, accompanied by the song lyrics "Britannia rules the waves". This makes an explicit reference

to the colonial period of the country, when the British Empire stretched across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean and the exploitation of the colonies brought riches to the British Isles. The exploitation of the colonies was "explained" as being a mission of enlightenment to "civilize" the non-Western people. "Rule Britannia" is a patriotic song dating back to 1740 the lyrics of which, as Jane Marcus (2004: 67) argues, define the imperialist Britain as a "civilization against the perceived savagery of those whom it has conquered across the seas". According to Dorling and Tomlinson (2019: n.p.) nowadays Britannia as a patriotic symbol is mostly used to create "a largely artificial sense of nationhood", as well as that of the "rightful position and destiny of the peoples who now live in the British Isles". Therefore, in the context of Brexit, Smith's reference to this particular song links the extreme nationalist feelings, entailing a sense of superiority, and xenophobia from the colonial period to the atmosphere of the post-referendum United Kingdom.

The empire is, however, not only a source of pride. Gilroy (2005: 94) has discussed the postcolonial heritage of the United Kingdom in terms of a "postcolonial melancholia" which, on the one hand, is related to pride about the former greatness of Britain, but on the other hand, guilt about the "difficult relationships with its colonial subjects". More specifically, Gilroy (2005: 94) refers to the "repressed and buried knowledge of the cruelty and injustice" against the colonial subjects. This knowledge remains repressed as it would potentially diminish the sense of British national pride that springs from the imagined past glories of the Empire. Therefore, a hostile response to any "others", including the Europeans, could be seen as a way of protecting that national pride, which, as already mentioned above, Smith depicts as false, or "artificial", as put by Dorling and Tomlinson (2019: n.p.).

This unresolved guilt about the past wrongdoings against the colonised can be understood through Ahmed`s (2004: 101) discussion about national shame. According to Ahmed (2004: 101), shame can be collectively felt by the whole nation. Whereas Gilroy

(2005: 94) referred to the repression of the knowledge that would trigger the sense of guilt, Ahmed (2004: 101) emphasises that acknowledging this guilt and accepting the feeling of national shame is crucial for the process of reconciliation with the past, and "the healing of past wounds".

In the novels, the topic of national shame and healing is treated through the parallels between the post-referendum UK and the Second World War era. The thugs sing "Rule Britannia" in the scene from *Autumn* described above, but this is followed by the phrase: "Britannia rules the waves. First we'll get the Poles. And then we'll get the Muslims. Then we'll get the gyppos, then the gays" (Smith 2017: 197). This quote extends the othering to not just to citizens of other countries and non-Christian religions but also to sexual minorities. These groups are reminiscent of those targeted by the Nazis during the Second World War. Ian McEwan argues that the British could consider themselves as innocent after WWII, since they had neither been occupied like the Netherlands, nor had they collaborated with Nazi Germany like the French Vichy regime, or perpetrated a Holocaust like the Germans (McEwan 2016: n.p, cited in Hauthal 2021: 303). This, however, enabled the British to overlook their own colonial past.

The Second World War, more specifically, Nazi Germany, is a topic that is often mentioned in the four novels by Smith. Daniel Gluck, a German Jew, in *Autumn*, as well as the storyline of his sister Hannah, the stories told by Iris and Sophia about their father, and the discussions of Paddy and Richard all draw parallels between the hate-filled atmosphere of wartime and the time around the Brexit referendum. In one of the scenes in *Spring*, in which the parallel is clearly highlighted, Richard says the following about the wartime:

> An awful time/…/ Always on television now, always the same awful pieces of footage, the same faces, *same thugs shouting don't buy from Jews, same shopfronts with the slogans painted on them*, same terrorized bullied people being filmed walking towards trains or away from them in the mud, same old Hitler shouting footage. As if such terrible history's a kind of entertainment. All that poison. All that anger. All that brutality. All that loss. You'd think we'd learn from it. But no, instead we play it on repeat, let it play away in the corner of the room while we go on with our lives regardless. Terrible times, easily resurrected. /…/ It's a bit like that song playing a minute ago on the radio. I have this

> same thought in supermarkets too when they play, you know, *music from decades ago* as if it's the soundtrack of now. Well, it is *the soundtrack of now*. It's as if. As if someone hobbled a horse. Made it *hard for it to move forward without something dragging it back*. (Smith 2020a: 241, 242, emphasis mine)

The sense of a similar mood, or feeling, is created, firstly, through the "soundtrack of now" being "music from decades ago". Similarly to the soundwaves, the prevailing feeling, in this case the angry division, is depicted as looming in the air as a background noise. This resonates with Williams` (2015: 193) statement about the structures of feeling located beyond words, often appearing in literary texts as that which has been left inarticulate. Comparing wartime – as presented in TV documentaries – and the examples of xenophobia in the post-referendum UK, the quote offers multiple parallels between the periods of nationality-based division. Firstly, the thugs shout at the Jews. The word "thug" has already been used by Smith to describe the group sing-shouting "Rule Britannia" after the Brexit referendum in *Autumn*, drawing a parallel between the feelings – and consequent behaviour – of the time periods. The thugs in the WWII documentaries shouting at the "othered" Jews could be seen as parallel to the scene from *Autumn* in which someone shouts at the Spanish couple. Secondly, the slogans painted on shopfronts are reminiscent of the phrase "GO HOME" painted on a wall of a cottage of those considered as the "others" in *Autumn*. Despite the knowledge of the consequences of the rage during WWII, the extract shows that the people living in the present have failed to learn from this past. This failure, however, makes it easy for the same mistakes to be repeated in the future. The image of the hobbled horse in the last sentence illustrates how an unresolved past, which might also be called an emotional baggage, makes it difficult to move forward.

So far, I have discussed how the division between the United Kingdom and Europe is reflected in the novels by considering the affective aspect of nationalism, as well as "othering" that works as a mechanism that constructs communities. I have also suggested that the perceived xenophobia of the British is related to both the colonial history of the nation, as

well as the Second World War period. However, in drawing parallels between the nationalist feelings of WWII and the post-referendum UK, the identification of the ones perceived as "others", "them", or even "foreigners" by the British is much more unclear in the case of Brexit. The confusion of identities is also a major issue when it comes to the identity of the British, the "us", themselves.

"Us" vs … "us"?

The British self-distancing from Europe might be a means of defining their national identity. Such a sentiment can be seen in the following extract from *Autumn*, in which a spokesperson on the radio states the following: "*…but it's not just that we've been rhetorically and practically encouraging the opposite of integration for immigrants to this country. It's that we've been rhetorically and practically encouraging ourselves not to integrate"* (Smith 2017: 111, emphasis original).

Stylistically, the italics and the underlined words "immigrants" and "ourselves" in the original text immediately stand out, emphasising the division between the UK natives and the immigrants living in the UK. The speaker stressing that the UK natives themselves have refused to integrate also notably contrasts the view of the right-wing spokesman from an extract discussed before, in which the immigrants were stated to be the cause of the issue. The idea that division is at least partially caused by this defiant attitude of the UK natives is also reflected in the conversations between Sophia and Iris, who represent the opposing opinions of the Brexit referendum in *Winter*. In one instance Sophia – who would probably have supported leaving the EU in the referendum – claims that the people who come to the UK are mostly "economic immigrants" wanting "better lives /…/, *our* lives". Here good life is associated with living in the UK and, thus, "the others" are represented as a threat, who want to take what is perceived as *ours*. Drawing an imagined line between "us" and the

"immigrants", Sophia also uses the phrase "people like us", to which Iris – who could be seen as representing the Remain voters – answers as follows: "Depends whether you think there's a them and an us, /…/, or just an us" (Smith 2018: 206). The social integration of immigrants has two sides. For one, the immigrant must accept the values and norms of the host society, as well as develop a sense of belonging to it. The host, however, has to ensure that the "immigrants are accepted as members of the society" (Laurentsyeva and Venturini 2017: 285). As claimed by the spokesperson on the radio, the UK has been unsuccessful at creating policies and a social environment for this integration. In an integrated society there would indeed be "just an us", as Iris puts it. However, saying that there is a unified *us* in the UK might easily prompt the question whether there is an *us* at all, and if, then who it is.

The same scene in which Sophia discusses the effects of the Second World War on her father also hints at a distinction made between the inhabitants of different countries living in the United Kingdom. Speaking to Lux (Charlotte), who was born in Croatia but lives in England, Sophia says: "You're not English, I know that, I can hear it in your voice". Although Sophia claims that she is "from a more open-minded generation" than her father, she nevertheless fails to accept that people living in the UK might speak in different accents (Smith 2018: 113). Having discussed nation in the context of the UK primarily as defined through citizenship, it is also worth noting how Sophia seems to link English identity to the "voice".

However, what Sophia says next seems to indicate a more profound problem with the English national identity. Sophia says that she is willing to "accept" Lux (Charlotte) "as every bit as English as myself" (ibid). When Charlotte responds by saying that she is not English, Sophia responds by saying: "You are to me" and puts "her hand in the air to stop further remonstration" (Smith 2018: 113, 114). There are a couple of telling phrases here. Firstly, the word "accept" is rather curious – it sounds equivalent to being "good enough"

instead of “good”, or even simply “being”. It also seems to indicate a sense of being in the superior position in relation to Lux, from which Sophia claims the right to “accept” Lux as a member of “us”. The community identified by Sophia as “ours” is “English”. As Lux rejects that identification, the response by Sophia is reminiscent of the ideas of “cruel optimism” and the fantasy of a “good life” discussed by Laurent Berlant (2011: 2). For Sophia the idea of a “good life” is attached to an English identity and this fantasy excludes anyone with another (national) identity from being a part of that “good life”. Therefore, labelling Lux as being English despite the latter’s objections is for Sophia the only way to link Lux to the community with whom she feels a sense of unity and belonging. If the true goal, however, is a united British society, the cruelty of this fantasy lies in the attachment to the idealised English identity making a united, multicultural British society unreachable. The sentiment expressed by Sophia resonates with the discussion of the legacy of the colonial history of the British Empire in the previous subchapter. In this case, however, the positions of “us” and “them” are occupied by “the English” and “the Others”, the latter now already including Europeans, but possibly also other nations covered by the term “British”. It can be argued that the “postcolonial melancholia” is mostly experienced by the English people, who dream of a unified British identity which erases all the ’others’ whom this Britishness should actually encompass, including the English, the Scottish, the Irish, the Welsh, and European and intenational immigrants who want to build a life in the UK.

The questions about British identity, also reflected in the novels, might be especially relevant in the times of Brexit due to the perceived division of a community into two groups. If, however, the “us” as a nation is supposed to be the British, a clear understanding of what exactly being British means becomes especially important for those belonging to this community. One of the examples of a confusion surrounding the British identity is highlighted in *Spring* with a conversation between two characters, Josh and Brit:

> Security, Josh said. That's what you call it. I call it upholding the *illusion*. What illusion? she said. That keeping people out is what it's all about, he said. What what's all about? she said. Being British, he said. English. /…/ *Wall ourselves in,* he said. Shoot ourselves in the foot. *Great nation. Great country*. (Smith 2020a: 158, emphasis mine)

Josh's criticism of Britishness resonates with many important issues already discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the word "illusion" might once again be linked to Berlant`s concept of "good life". The illusion of being a "Great nation. Great country" could be seen as a cushion for the British national identity, as the umbrella term allows for the idea that the united British identity indeed exists. Since the UK consists of different countries, and not just one "great country", the phrasing highlights how the term "British" is often used to refer to narrowly the "English". This problem, however, is not addressed, according to Josh. Instead, the focus of Brexit is laid on immigration. "Walling" the UK in via Brexit to keep the immigrants and other ethnic identities out would, then, not solve the problem of British identity.

The image of walling the nation in recurs in a scene in *Summer* in which a young boy, Robert Greenlaw, declares that learning different languages – and not just German or French but also Welsh – has become pointless after Brexit (Smith 2020b: 361). The negative impact of the Brexit referendum on foreign language learning has already been noted by scholars (Lanvers et al 2018). As language is an affective national symbol, this comment on language learning illustrates a sense of Brexit cutting the UK off from not just the other European countries and their culture. This self-isolation also involves the other nations within the UK, such as the Welsh. Such a view, however, is challenged by Charlotte who compares languages to a family constantly "feeding into each other", going on to claim that isolated languages do not exist (Smith 2020b: 361). Indeed fact, English like all other languages itself has been extensively influenced by many other languages.

Another reoccurring image in the tetralogy is that of a passport. A passport is a proof of the owner`s national identity. The symbol of a passport, as well as the issues Elisabeth has

with it in *Autumn*, might be read as yet another way in which the topic of a British identity is reflected in the novels. As Elisabeth struggles to get her passport renewed, the man at the office first makes a comment about Elisabeth`s name, written with an *s* instead of the *z* which the man claims to be "the normal way". Then her photo gets rejected, as the man "writes in a box next to the word *Other*: HEAD INCORRECT SIZE" (Smith 2017: 25). The word "Other" is of particular interest in the current context since the British passport has the row "nationality", which requires a specification "British", "British overseas territories", etc. Being labelled "the Other" means that Elisabeth loses a valid proof of her (national) identity, regardless of how she identifies herself. The issue of "othering" is made even more peculiar by her being rejected for an "incorrect" size of the head. While this is only related with a photo requirement, it also hints at the arbitrariness of identity markers. Loss of official proof of identity makes Elisabeth ask: "Who needs a passport? Who am I? Where am I? What am I?" (Smith 2017: 202). This seems to indicate broader confusion about "British" national identity.

This chapter has analysed the theme of division based on nationality in the seasonal tetralogy. On the one hand I analysed how national-identity based division is depicted on international level, embedded in the idea of 'British self' versus an 'European' or 'international' other. The societal division related to political events such as the Brexit referendum involves xenophobia. As illustrated by the links to World War II, this xenophobia can lead to devastating consequences, most significantly the suffering of those "othered". On the other hand, I explored how the nationality-based division is also present within the United Kingdom, because this political 'union' consists of various different ethnic identities such as English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh. My reading of Smith suggests that the roots of the issue lie in the British imperial and colonial history. Both the division between the United Kingdom and Europe, and the one within the United Kingdom were magnified by the Brexit

referendum. This makes division a prominent structure of feeling of the post-referendum United Kingdom.

3. HOPE

This section is dedicated to the importance of communication in the seasonal tetralogy, in a way serving as a suggested solution to rebind and heal the divided community and navigate the tumultuous period of change. What Smith seems to be conveying is that to overcome division, people have to relearn communication *without* attacking "the other". As a system of communication, art more broadly and literature specifically could be a tool that has the potential to reteach dialogue. Analysing the expression of hope in the seasonal tetralogy, I am considering it as one of the prominent structures of feeling of the post-referendum United Kingdom.

First, "communication" here is discussed as the process of turning individual experiences into common ones in the broadest sense, to make oneself understood, *share* the experience, and use this to function in the social world, or as put by Williams (1961: 55), to be able to live at all. The medium, thus, could be anything that establishes a contact between people, including speaking, writing, and the arts (Williams 1961: 55). As communication might be regarded as an important aspect of maintaining a society, dysfunctional communication would also lead to a dysfunctional society and divided communities. Similarly, Smith notes in *Autumn* that: "It has become a time of people saying stuff to each other and none of it actually ever becoming dialogue. It is the end of dialogue" (Smith 2017: 112). This comment comes after Elisabeth listens to two spokesmen arguing on the radio. Understanding "dialogue" in the broadest sense of interactive communication between two parties, this dysfunction is especially problematic during – and also due to – times of tension. Analysing an extract with the phrase "All across the country…" from *Autumn* in the section

on division, I stated that Smith uses the images of walls, fences, and barriers to illustrate division (Smith 2017: 61). Therefore, the quote about the end of dialogue above might be figuratively imagined as two groups throwing words at each other, but these words bounce back from the wall instead of reaching the other side. In this case, both parties would indeed express themselves, but would not be understood, resulting in a failure in communication. Avoiding a conflict between the Remainers and Leavers in the Brexit referendum would require a well-organised, open communication. This, however, is exactly what Smith claims has ended. The post-referendum atmosphere a week after the vote is described as follows:

> "/…/ The village is in a sullen state. /…/ People either look down, look away or stare her *[Elisabeth]* out. People in the shops /…/ speak with a new kind of *detachment*. People she passes on the streets on the way from the bus stop to her mother's house regard her, and each other, with a new kind of loftiness. Her mother, who tells her when she gets there that *half the village* isn't speaking to *the other half of the village*…" (Smith 2017: 53, emphasis mine).

While this extract demonstrates how the village, as a community, has been divided by the referendum result, it is worth noting how this division is realised through cutting off communication with the other "half". Not only are people either avoiding eye contact or hostilely staring at Elisabeth but they are also not speaking to each other. On the level of this village as a community, it is also significant that it has split into two halves. A similar example about the end of a dialogue can also be noted in this description of a headline in a newspaper: "there's an attack taking place on MPs by MPs of the same party who don't agree with them" (Smith 2018: 219). Whether a village or a political party, these divisions, or even attacks, happen due to an apparent unwillingness to hold a dialogue with those having a different opinion. This polarization is especially stark in the last extract, as this tendency has reached the level of the government.

Communication and dialogue as keys to dissolving the barriers created by differences – but also to address the other major changes such as COVID-19 and climate crisis discussed earlier – is especially prominent in *Summer*. For example, Sascha, a teenage character, has a school assignment to write an essay about forgiveness to "mark one week since Brexit"

(Summer, Smith 2020b: 8). Searching for references, she finds the following quote, attributed to Hannah Arendt: "*Forgiveness is the only way to reverse the irreversible flow of history*" (Summer, Smith 2020b: 8). Here, Smith uses italics and underlining in the original text to emphasise the message. The necessity of forgiveness seems especially noteworthy in the light of the "othering" discussed in the subchapter on division. If shame, as stated by Ahmed (2004: 101), is indeed crucial to reconciliation and the "healing of the past wounds", in order for a community to reunify and move on, it is also necessary that the other is able to forgive the "us" who once caused them pain. This point is even further highlighted by the fact that Arendt is a German-Jewish political philosopher who fled the Nazi Germany after a brief imprisonment. The personal experience of Arendt as a survivor of the Nazi regime would make a quote about forgiveness even more impactful. However, Sascha finds the quote on various unreliable sites on the internet, and it remains uncertain whether or not it can be attributed to Arendt. As Sascha insists on using this quote in her essay despite the uncertainty about the source, the emphasis is put on the message. Regardless of whether it is the Nazi regime or Brexit, the way forward, past the societal division, is, first, forgiveness. Regret and forgiveness as healers of society would first require breaking down the walls which divide the polarised groups, and starting an open dialogue to understand the point of view of the other party, and resolve the issues created by the lack of interaction, and the resulting misunderstandings.

Summer, and the whole seasonal tetralogy, ends with a letter from Hero, a refugee who was detained after arriving in the UK, to Sascha:

> Your letters make me very happy. Thank you for the bird messages. *Bird of all nations*. It looks like something created with only the ash after a fire, like a delicate gesture of ash. But truly it is as strong as the anchor that holds a boat in the sea. /…/ The bird that I see in the sky, the bird of your kindness in your letters to me, will fly to you in your sky in the shape of members of its family (Smith 2020b: 379, emphasis mine).

Sascha and Hero were strangers with mutual acquaintances. By deciding to write to this stranger isolated from the rest of the world, Sascha established a connection which, as

reflected in the letter, made Hero happy enough for him to thank Sascha after being released. Perhaps even more importantly, however, this act of kindness provided Hero with hope in his difficult situation. Whereas his detention is repressive enough on its own, at this point in *Summer*, the world is also affected by COVID-19, the deaths caused by it, and isolation due to lockdown, which all add further weight to the prevailing mood. In this light, the interpersonal communication through these letters obtains an even greater significance.

The bird in the extract above is also an eloquent symbol. Hero mentions the bird because Sascha initially wrote about the swifts, calling them "a flying message in a bottle", to share something beautiful with Hero in the midst of his difficult situation (Smith 2020b: 119). As Hero`s final letter is written after he has been released, prompting the line: "I write to you today because I have seen this bird and its family in my sky" (Smith 2020b: 377), the bird also serves as a symbol of hope and freedom. The sky where the bird flies is limitless, free of both borders and restrictions. Hero also writes that the swift is a "bird of all nations" because it is migratory. By flying between Africa and Europe, the bird might also be seen as connecting different parts of the world. The letter exchange between Sascha and Hero is important in terms of both Sascha reaching out to Hero, offering her support to a stranger through this act of communication, as well as the use of the swift as a message of hope, human kindness, and connection.

Art as a system of communication

Raymond Williams (1961: 51) sees art as an "imitation", the formation of a perception of the surrounding world in the creative mind (Williams 1961: 24). Williams argues that in order to turn this imitation into a creative work, the creator must first "learn the reality" (ibid). The word 'learning' signals the first step to the central idea of this chapter – using art to reteach society communication. Williams (1961: 38, 39, 55) includes different

elements of structures of feeling characterising a certain place and a time period. A similar sentiment is also expressed by Smith in *Summer*, in considering art as "*saturated with the unconscious acts like a compensatory dream in the individual*" (Smith 2020b: 263). The unconscious acts, and elements, which art is saturated with, might be understood as what Williams discusses as the different levels of culture – the lived, the recorded, and the selective – coming together in a structure of feeling. In this case, art would become a record of its time. The comparison to a "compensatory" dream, however, might be read as a reference to art being only an imitation of the complex reality of the entire "lived culture" experienced by the individual. According to Williams, art is a system of communication because it is a medium for the authors to convey their individual experience, which turns into a common experience when received by the audience. In *Summer,* Smith (2020b: 263) also states that art serves to "*address deep-rooted problems*" of the world.

As the analysis above concerned "the end of dialogue" I suggest that the seasonal tetralogy's treatment of the post-referendum UK reopens the discussion of societal division. This societal division, especially when considering the long history of the UK, is an old and deep-rooted issue. By establishing a connection between the structures of feeling of the British Empire, WWII and the Brexit referendum, art might help to learn from the past, and through that, perhaps also relearn the dialogue which seems to have been lost. In this light, Smith's novels – her form of art – function as modes of communication to allow the people of the UK to find a dialogue again. Whereas journalism, as stated by Kelly (2018: 75), has to be fast and provisional, literature allows for a more thorough reflection and analysis on the events that unfolded following the referendum. Here, it must be mentioned that writing the novels so soon after the event they cover also risks *not* leaving enough time for a distanced and thorough reflection. Similarly, Kelly (2018: 83) notes a risk of dependence on the "day-to-dayness of the Brexit process" for inspiration. Nevertheless, Brexit novels can serve as at

least a start of this very important social discussion. According to Berlant (2011: 122), "to be teachable is to be open for change". This process is not easy as, Berlant (2011: 121) adds that "history hurts", but as Smith's novels also show, the hurt is necessary to learn from history. The prospect of being able to be taught creates the optimistic hope in the possibility of change.

Since the seasonal tetralogy opened up a conversation about division, othering, and the dangers in the context of Brexit, the novels could be used as tools to learn from that experience and work towards a change in the future. References to the importance of art, especially in conflicted times appear throughout the tetralogy. For example, in *Winter*, Arthur asks Sophia and Iris about the difference between politics and art, to which Sophia answers that the two are polar opposites, whereas Iris answers via text message that the difference

> is more betwn artist and politician – endlss enemies coz they both knw *THE HUMAN* will alwys srface in art no mtter its politics, & *THE HUMAN* wll hv t be absent or repressed in mst politics no mtter its art (Smith 2018: 316, emphasis mine).

Stylistically, the typing errors above imitate text messaging. The most important aspect of this quote for my analysis is the setting of a human at the centre of the discussion. This is emphasised by capitalising "THE HUMAN" twice. The suppression of humanness in politics resonates with the discussion of immigrants after the Brexit referendum. By regarding immigrants as a unified group of "others", one is more likely to either overlook or ignore the different individuals who belong to this group. An immigrant who has been dehumanised through this generalisation is much more likely to be attacked by an extreme nationalist because the latter does not acknowledge the human being behind the label of the "other". Therefore, a clear communication of the humanness of the "other" is crucial. Art focuses on this humanness, regardless of politics and this can rebind people in times of major political conflict.

The seasonal tetralogy includes many references to artworks, including literature, film, music and painting. In the chapter discussing division, I drew parallels between

divisions in the post-referendum United Kingdom, the British Empire and WWII-era Europe. Smith uses references to artworks from these periods to highlight the similar sense of division, with communication as the key to overcome it. For example, in *Winter*, there is a discussion about *Cymbeline*, a play by William Shakespeare:

> …the people in the play are living in the same world but separately from each other, like their worlds have somehow become disjointed or broken off each other's worlds. But if they could just step out of themselves, or just hear and see what's happening right next to their ears and eyes, they'd see it's the same play they're all in, the same world, that they're all part of the same story (Smith 2018: 200, 201).

Although the play is set in Ancient Britain and written in the 17th century, as the British Empire was forming, the description above resonates with the post-referendum UK`s sense of division. In this case, the "us" and "them", both in Shakespeare`s play and the United Kingdom reflected in the seasonal tetralogy, could indeed be claimed to live in two separate worlds, or perhaps headspaces, despite being in the same country. The importance of communication in breaking down the barriers is also emphasised, as it is suggested that the differences could be cast aside if the groups exited their separate bubbles and started communicating with each other.

Another striking usage of previous artworks connecting different eras in the seasonal tetralogy is a discussion about a 1950s British film by Lorenza Mazzetti:

> About two men who are friends and are both deaf mutes, who can't talk like everyone else does, so instead *they find their own ways to*. One's thin and tall, one's small and squat, *they couldn't be more different*, but they couldn't be more connected. /…/ And the film says all these complicated things, and it does it *without saying a word*/... (Smith 2020b: 109, emphasis mine).

This post-WWII film is said to be "about not talking", emphasising the importance of communication (Smith 2020b: 109). As the setting of the film is the "bomb-blasted landscape of London", the two film characters are in an environment which has recently experienced much destruction. In such circumstances communication by any means available is especially emphasised. Even if a verbal dialogue is inaccessible, "finding their own ways to" communicate, and establish a connection, is vital. The remark that the two characters in the 1950s film "couldn`t be more different" also resonates with the situation in the post-

referendum UK. Perhaps most importantly, the current discussion is that the film, as an artwork, communicates this crucial message "without saying a word". Communication works affectively, via emotions and shared feelings. Saturated with affects, art, as a system of communication, helps us understand the workings of the social world.

Art, as treated by Smith in the seasonal tetralogy, can take many different forms. Both *Winter* and *Summer* feature a (fictional) blog called Art in Nature. The name of the blog emphasises the importance of nature and its value in arts. As climate crisis is a prominent theme in the whole tetralogy, the natural imagery in the novels communicates the value of nature itself. Ecocritics such as Kostowska (2013: 107, 146) have highlighted how Smith considers nature not just as a setting or a symbol, but a character of its own. By claiming that there is art in nature and showing its beauty, Smith raises awareness of the urgency to preserve it. While I have already highlighted the reference to a swift (itself part of nature) in the letter exchange in *Summer* as a symbol of hope and connection, the following extract is much more closely related to the World War II period:

> *Up on the balcony a man* is standing with a *hawk* on his arm, a working bird he sends back and fore across the station to stop *pigeons from thinking they can come in here* for scavenging or roosting. But a *buddleia* is growing in the wall up next to the roof above the old platforms. It is bright purple against the brickwork. Buddleia is tenacious. After the Second World War, when so many of the cities were in *ruins*, buddleia was one of the most common plants to take hold in the *wreckage*. *The ruins* filled with it here and *all over Europe* (Smith 2018: 220, emphasis mine).

The man on the balcony might, firstly, be read as a political leader. The use of bird imagery is also significant. Hawks are the stronger raptors who symbolise the "us" in the earlier discussion. Working for the political leader and following their commands, they go after the pigeons, common birds on the streets. The pigeons can be anyone regarded as "the other". In that context, it is important to note the sense of entitlement of the leader and the "us" that is reflected in the wording: "thinking they can come here…". Next to the social conflict is an image of buddleia, which is, in a sense, an artwork by nature. The natural artwork filling the ruins as "wounded" structures, then, is rather telling of the process of art

reconnecting the structures following a destructive conflict. In addition, there are parallels between the two natural images of the swift from the letters and the buddleia. The "wreckage" and "ruins" in the extract above are similar to the ashes from which the swift rose in Hero's letter. Similarly to the swift connecting parts of the world, the buddleia is said to be "all over Europe" (Smith 2018: 220). In this light, Smith uses nature imagery, such as birds and plants, to play with the idea of the world healing after turmoil to move towards a more hopeful future.

A discussion about a TV drama on the impact of Holocaust in *Spring* returns to the responsibility towards history, but also perhaps towards a hope for change. The show is called Andy Hoffnung, which is a word play with the piece An die Hoffnung (in English: "to hope") by Beethoven. Bearing in mind the translation of the phrase, it is commented that: "I loved how she'd [Patricia Heal, the screenwriter] made the song name become the man's name. I loved how she made words that mean *dedicated to hope* into an actual person, how she gave the words a human shape" (Smith 2020a: 271, emphasis original).

Giving hope a human shape suggests that when confronted with dehumanisation due to politics, it is up to the individual to preserve the human qualities which make civil communication possible. Williams (1961: 96) claims that a human being is "fundamentally alienated from society". Art can reduce this alienation by focusing on the human being. Both within the story-level of Ali Smith`s novels and the novels as artworks themselves, the seasonal tetralogy illustrates how art, understood in the broadest sense of the word (re)teaches society to value the human, (re)establish communication between people, and rebind a nation divided by politics.

Berlant (2011: 13) points out that hope is optimistic because it is future-oriented. Referring to *Cruising Utopia* by José Esteban Muñoz, Berlant more specifically, states that hope points from "the past`s unfinished business to a future beyond the present" that feels

like a prison (Berlant 2011: 13). I am claiming that in seasonal tetralogy, hope lies in communication through art because there is a prospect of a future beyond the division and othering acutely sensed in the present political situation.

CONCLUSION

"Structure of feeling" is a notion originally developed by Raymond Williams, the aim of which is to analyse the present historical moment as experienced by people. This experience, as argued by Williams, is the result of different material, social and affective elements coming together in a specific place and a time period (Williams 1977: 128-133). Already Williams stresses that human experience cannot be fully grasped without consideration of affect. This idea has been developed by different contemporary affect theorists like Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Ben Anderson, and Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup. They provide us with a deeper understanding of what has, in this thesis, been often referred to as the "lived experience". Perhaps even more significantly, such an attention to the present moment and the prominent structures of feeling enable us to recognise certain patterns in the still-forming, yet-to-be-fixed experiences. It has been argued that art – in its broadest sense, including literature, music, visual arts, etc – reflects the structures of feelings of contemporary time and place. For this reason, I chose this specific approach to analyse the seasonal tetralogy by Ali Smith. With the tetralogy being labelled as one examples of the many "Brexit novels" which were noted to appeared shortly after the Brexit referendum in June 2016, immediate attention to the structures of feeling reflected in the novels seemed to become even more necessary to help us grasp the role of affects in contemporary society.

First, my analysis of the seasonal tetralogy revealed the sense of change as a prominent structure of feeling in the post-referendum United Kingdom that was undergoing a number of major changes. The characters in the novels are simultaneously affected by the changes brought on by the Brexit referendum, the presidency of Donald Trump in the USA, climate crisis and COVID-19. As demonstrated in the analysis, all of these changes create a strong sense of uncertainty about the future, but are also sources of negative affects such as shock and fear. Considering the perceived effects of the Brexit referendum, the resurfaced

"othering" noticeable in public displays of xenophobia appeared especially alarming in the novels. This alarm was intensified by the recognition of similarly patterned extreme "othering" from history, and the sense of this pattern being about to repeat as a cycle. By analysing the sense of change, I demonstrated that the awareness of the world changing within a present moment is also intensified by the news and social media, adding even further weight to the affective impact of change.

Second, my analysis revealed the sense of division as a prominent structure of feeling of the place and period. Based on the novels, I have been suggesting that one of the major causes of division in British society is nationalism as a phenomenon producing both positive affects, such as pride and happiness, and negative affects, such as hate and the fear of the Other. I focused on two types of divisions represented in the novels. First, there is the division between the UK and Europe, which, on a societal level, involves xenophobia. By linking the sentiments visible in the public sphere in the post-referendum UK to the periods of World War II (Nazi Germany) and the British Empire, Smith demonstrates that the sense of division following the Brexit referendum can lead to devastating consequences, most significantly the suffering of the group who gets "othered". This is why attention – and reaction – to this sense is crucial. Second, I found that the Brexit referendum highlighted a division within the British society itself. More specifically, the imperial and colonial past of the nation can still be seen as creating tensions in terms of national identity, and what it means to be "British".

Third, the analysis of the tetralogy revealed a sense of hope in the form of restoring communication as a way of overcoming division as a prominent structure of feeling of the period. Art, understood in the broadest sense to include literature, music, visual arts and more, can be considered as one of such forms of communication. Art has the potential to reteach society dialogue, first, in reflecting the structures of feeling of the community and the

society. In addition, the expressions of the existing and still-forming structures of feeling can provide suggestions about the future, towards which the society is moving. This requires awareness of the historical patterns that might re-emerge, as was shown in the subchapters about change and division. Both subchapters drew attention to the dangers of extreme nationalism. Second, in the face of such societal divisions, art has the potential of rebinding the society because artworks tend to focus on a specific human in a nuanced, unstereotypical way, unlike in politics (Smith 2018: 317). Such a reflection of the society includes affects and emotions felt by the human who experiences the particular time and place, offering a reader a key to identifying with that experience through common feelings.

The theoretical and empirical chapters of this thesis demonstrated how Williams' structures of feeling, combined with affect theory, could be used for literary and cultural analysis. However, future research could develop the notion of structures of feeling further, by combining the original input of Williams, later criticism of his theory, and affect theory. In terms of a methodology, the mechanisms of revealing structures of feelings and affect in literature also remain to be expanded in future research. Scholars like Sharma and Tygstrup (2015: 5) have suggested that in order to locate structures of feeling in fiction, one must first identify the different elements, which belong to the categories and levels of culture as discussed by Williams, and then associate them to one another to form the structure. Clues to developing this methodology can also be found in Williams`(2015: 168) discussion on the necessity of attention to both the articulated and the unarticulated in the analysis of the language and style of the text. As demonstrated in the empirical chapter, attention to language as a carrier of affects indeed does point to specific elements important in the broader structure of feeling. For example, the intensity of the effect of division was conveyed through the repetition of images such as a wall, a fence, a line or a slash, but also verb phrases. The

affective nature of language once again points to the benefit of affect theory to literary analysis.

Through the above analysis of Smith's novels, affects, and structures of feelings I have demonstrated that literature can be effectively used for analysis of wider political and cultural phenomena. I hope that my analysis here prompts further research in the field, so we can continue to develop Williams' concept of structures of feeling in relation to our contemporary present moment and critical tools.

REFERENCES

Primary sources:

Smith, Ali. 2017. *Autumn*. London: Penguin Books.

Smith, Ali. 2018. *Winter*. London: Penguin Books.

Smith, Ali. 2020a. *Spring*. London: Penguin Books.

Smith, Ali. 2020b. *Summer*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Secondary sources:

Ahmed, Sara. 2010. Happy Objects. In Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds). *The Affect Theory Reader*, 29-51. New York: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Anderson, Ben. 2014. *Encountering Affect: Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities*. London and New York: Verso.

Antonsich, Marco, Michael Skey, Shanti Sumartojo, Peter Merriman, Angharad Closs Stephens, Divya Tolia-Kelly, Helen F. Wilson, Ben Anderson. 2020. The spaces and politics of affective nationalism. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38: 4, 579-598.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Calder, Alex J. 2019. 'The great connective': Contemporaneous Storytelling and Emergent Seriality in Ali Smith's Seasonal. *Alluvium*, 7: 5, n.p.

Clarke, Harold D., Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley. 2017. *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Conway, Tove. 2021. Feminist Forms and Borderless Landscapes in Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet. *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21: 1, 105-114.

Cvetkovich, Ann. 2012. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Dorling, Danny and Sally Tomlinson. 2019. *Rule Britannia. Brexit and the End of the Empire*. London: Biteback Publishing.

Filmer, Paul. 2003. Structures of feeling and socio-cultural formations: the significance of literature and experience to Raymond Williams's sociology of culture. *British Journal of Sociology* 54: 2, 199-219.

Gilroy, Paul. 2005. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1999. Un-settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post-nation: whose heritage? *Third Text*, 13: 49, 3-13.

Hauthal, Janine. 2021. Explaining Brexit. (Re-)Thinking the Nexus of Nation and Narration in Pre- and Post-Referendum British Fiction. In Antonius Weixler, Matei Chihaia, Matías Martínez, Katharina Rennhak, Michael Scheffel and Roy Sommer (eds). *Postfaktisches Erzählen?*, 297-322. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter

Heidemann, Birte. 2020. The Brexit within: Mapping the rural and the urban in contemporary British fiction, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 56:5, 676-688.

Hobolt, Sara B. 2016. The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23:9, 1259-1277.

Horgan, Mary. 2016. About Change: Ali Smith's Numismatic Modernism, *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 10:2, 155-174.

Jones, David Martin. 2019. Brexit and the Decline of the English Novel, *Quadrant*, 93-99.

Kelly, Richard T. 2018. Brexit in fact and fiction: a few first drafts of history, *Critical Quarterly*, 60: 2, 74-85.

Kostkowska, Justyna. 2013. *Ecocriticism and Women Writers: Environmentalist Poetics of Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson, and Ali Smith*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lanvers, Ursula, Hannah Doughty, Amy S. Thompson. 2018. Brexit as Linguistic Symptom of Britain Retreating into its Shell? Brexit-Induced Politicization of Language Learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 102: 4, 775-796.

Laurentsyeva, Nadzeya and Alessandra Venturini. 2017. The Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy – A Literature Review. *Intereconomics*, 52:5, 285-292.

Lyall, Sarah. 2017. From Ali Smith, It's the First Great Brexit Novel. *The New York Times*, February 17, n.p. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/books/review/autumn-ali-smith.html, accessed October 17, 2021.

Marcus, Jane. 2004. *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Matthews, Sean. 2001. Change and theory in Raymond Williams's structure of feeling. *Pretexts: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 10: 2, 179-194.

McLeod, John. 2020. Warning Signs: Postcolonial writing and the apprehensions of Brexit. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 56: 5, 607-620.

Peschel, Lisa. 2012. "Structures of Feeling" as Methodology and the Re-emergence of Holocaust Survivor Testimony in 1960s Czechoslovakia. *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 26: 2, 161-172.

Pittel, Harald. 2018. Fiction in Dark Times: The Brexit Novel and Ali Smith, *Hard Times* 101: 1, 58-67.

Read, Rosie and Lee-Ann Fenge. 2018. What does Brexit mean for the UK social care workforce? Perspectives from the recruitment and retention frontline. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 27, 676-682.

Ryle, Martin. 2009. Neo-Pastoral Eco-Didactics: Ali Smith's *The Accidental*. *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, 10:1, 8-18.

Schaefer, Donovan O. 2019. *The Evolution of Affect Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sharma, Devika and Frederik Tygstrup (eds). 2015. *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Shaw, Kristian. 2018. BrexLit. In Robert Eaglestone (ed). *Brexit and Literature*, 15-31. London and New York: Routledge.

Seddon, Terri and Beatrix Niemeyer. 2018. Experiencing Europe after the Brexit Shock. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17: 6, 757-765.

Smith, Ali. 2019. 'I thought it would be about the seasons': Ali Smith on writing Autumn. The Guardian, September 21, n.p. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/21/i-initially-thought-it-would-be-about-the-season-ali-smith-on-writing-autumn, accessed October 17, 2021.

Smith, Zadie. 2016. Fences: A Brexit Diary. *The New York Review*, August 18.

Wally, Johannes. 2018. The Return of Political Fiction? An Analysis of Howard Jacobson's *Pussy* (2017) and Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016) as First Reactions to the Phenomena 'Donald Trump' and 'Brexit' in *Contemporary British Literature AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* , 43: 1, 63-86.

Williams, Raymond. 1965. *The Long Revolution*. London: Penguin Books.

Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Williams, Raymond. 2015. *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*. London and New York: Verso.

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Grete Pärn

Structures of Feeling in Ali Smith`s Seasonal Tetralogy (Tundestruktuurid Ali Smithi aastaaegade tetraloogias)

(magistritöö)

2022

Lehekülgede arv: 61

Annotatsioon:

Magistritöö eesmärk on analüüsida Brexiti referendumi järgse Ühendkuningriigi ühiskonna kujutamist Ali Smithi romaanides „Sügis“ (2016), „Talv“ (2017), „Kevad“ (2019) ja „Suvi“ (2020), kasutades selleks Raymond Williamsi „tundestruktuuride“ kontseptsiooni, mida on täiendatud kaasaegse afektiteooriaga.

Sissejuhatus annab kokkuvõtliku ülevaate Brexitist, Ühendkuningriikide kujunemise ajaloolisest taustast, Euroopa Liidu liikmelisusest ja rahvusluse küsimusest, mida on romaanides näidatud referendumi tulemuse oluliste mõjutajatena. Samuti on sissejuhatuses ülevaade „Brexiti romaanidest“ üldiselt ning Ali Smithi teostest ja varasematest tema tööd puudutavatest uurimustest. Töö teoreetiline peatükk annab ülevaate Raymond Williamsi „tundestruktuuride“ kontseptsioonist, mille keskmes on erinevate kultuurina mõistetavate elementide kooslusel tekkiv kaasaja tunnetus. Et Williams viitas lisaks ajaloolistele, materiaalsetele ja ühiskondlikele faktoritele ka tänapäeval afektidena käsitletava tähtsusele, käsitletakse afektiteoorikute, eeskätt Sara Ahmedi, Lauren Berlanti ja Ben Andersoni ideid. Käesoleva töö empiirilises osas analüüsitakse läbi „tundestruktuuride“ kontseptsiooni Smithi teostes peegelduvaid muutuseid ühiskonnas, erinevate ühiskonnagruppide vahelist lõhustumist ning lootust selle lõimimiseks. Viimane avaldub omavahelise suhtluse ja dialoogi taastamises, milles mängib olulist rolli kunst selle sõna üldiseimas tähenduses.

Märksõnad: briti kirjandus, tundestruktuurid, kirjandusteooria, afektiteooria, Ali Smith

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina, Grete Pärn

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) minu loodud teose
Structures of Feeling in Ali Smith`s Seasonal Tetralogy,

mille juhendajad on prof. Raili Marling ja dr. Eret Talviste,

reprodutseerimiseks eesmärgiga seda säilitada, sealhulgas lisada digitaalarhiivi DSpace kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni.

2. Annan Tartu Ülikoolile loa teha punktis 1 nimetatud teos üldsusele kättesaadavaks Tartu Ülikooli veebikeskkonna, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace kaudu Creative Commonsi litsentsiga CC BY NC ND 4.0, mis lubab autorile viidates teost reprodutseerida, levitada ja üldsusele suunata ning keelab luua tuletatud teost ja kasutada teost ärieesmärgil, kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni.

3. Olen teadlik, et punktides 1 ja 2 nimetatud õigused jäävad alles ka autorile.

4. Kinnitan, et lihtlitsentsi andmisega ei riku ma teiste isikute intellektuaalomandi ega isikuandmete kaitse õigusaktidest tulenevaid õigusi.

Grete Pärn
17.05.2022

Autorsuse kinnitus

Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva magistritöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride kolledži anglistika osakonna magistritöö nõuetest ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

Grete Pärn

17.05.2022

Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

Raili Marling

17.05.2022

Eret Talviste

17.05.2022