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Seasons Without Borders: the Ali Smith Quartet

An Honors Paper for the Department of English

By Claire M. Burns

Bowdoin College, 2021

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INTRODUCTION

To some extent, all literature abides by established formal and temporal borders, following certain conventions of linear time, grammar, or structuralization. In Scottish literary history, however, borders carry more than just formal importance; they are thematically pervasive, their significance tracking from early medieval ballads to the present day. Ranging from the national border dividing England and Scotland, to the religious border dividing Protestantism and Catholicism, Scotland's many external and internal borders have influenced how its national literature has established its own borders. In this project, I am interested in considering how the borders that have become essential to the construction of Scottish national literature, often relying on fixed and binaristic categorizations, have been disestablished in the contemporary era. As I will explore throughout this project, national literature has been insistent on maintaining the borders on which it has been built. Through the work of one contemporary Scottish author, Ali Smith, whose writing reflects a significant interest in interrogating conventional temporal, formal, and gender borders, I will reveal the instability of many of the borders historically used to define national identity, giving way to the exploration of identity beyond the boundaries of Scotland and extending toward a more global sensibility.

Smith, whose novels have garnered global attention in the last two decades, has previously located herself within the framework of Scottish literary history, identifying her influence from Scottish writers such as Muriel Spark and James Hogg. Many of her novels employ a supernaturalism that borrows heavily from Scottish gothic literature in their "association between the national and the uncanny" (Germaná 3). Hogg, as one of the chief figures in Scottish gothic literature, bridges modern language with Scottish folk tale and supernatural tradition, establishing a "magical realism" which places reality and fantasy in the

same dimension (Duncan 1). Similarly, Smith takes from a surrealist Scottish tradition that embraces a dark, dreamy aesthetic best embodied by Alastair Gray's *Lanark*: a novel split into four disjointed sections following the journey of a man through a bizarre version of Glasgow (Hargan 1). As I will discuss in this project, and drawing on such literary ancestors as Spark, Hogg, and Gray, Smith has a particular interest in these past uses of genre and seeks to establish a fluidity between the supernatural, the surreal, and the real in her novels.

Although Smith at least partially places herself within Scottish tradition, in a 1995 interview Smith expresses her disinterest in using borders as they've traditionally been employed in Scottish literature to maintain division saying, "I don't find labels at all helpful. Where do you start and where do you stop? Scottish, lesbian, right-handed, Catholic, Invernesian, everything is relevant and none of them is more relevant than the other" (Gonda 5). Smith more closely takes after the work of Virginia Woolf, who Smith identifies as her most influential ancestor in a number of lectures and her 2012 book *Artful* in that both Smith and Woolf revel in instability, both formally and within the interiority of their characters. In the foreword to the essay collection "Ali Smith: Critical Contemporary Perspectives," Marina Warner writes on how the "unstable boundaries of self" that define the writing of Virginia Woolf can also be used to describe the characterization in Smith's works (Warner ix). Like Woolf, Smith aims to break borders, to identify their weaknesses and faults, challenging their structuralization of Scottishness. In a more recent 2015 interview with Tory Young, Young introduces Smith by saying, "her literary experimentation and concern with narrative style are not aims in themselves but are animated by an ethical desire: the humane concern for the expression of a range of emotions and marginalized voices" (Young 133). As Young outlines, Smith's playfulness with literary borders reflects a greater concern with cultural borders and how they define Scottishness.

The notion of having split communal and individual identities has become one of the most reliable markers of Scottishness since the Middle Ages. One significant historical marker of dual identity can be traced back, found in the figure of Mary Queen of Scots in her juggling of French and Scottish identities, as well as in the Knoxian perception of her feminine and sovereign identities being in opposition (Knox). Walter Scott's *Waverly* (1814) similarly centers its main character, Englishman Edward Waverly, on the border between the two sides of the Jacobite uprising in 1745: those supporting the return of the House of Stuarts to the throne and those against it. Both the external border between England and Scotland and the internal border between the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands play roles in shaping the central conflict of the novel in their division of Scottishness. The Scottish border identity follows in the 20th century with Hugh MacDiarmid's 1926 poem "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle" in which MacDiarmid declares, "I'll hae nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur/ Extremes meet" ("A Drunk Man" 141-142). In this line, MacDiarmid places himself within the Scottish duality of self. Throughout the poem, he identifies himself as on the border between a number of "extremes;" Scots and English dialects, individuality and nationality, and so on. MacDiarmid's gazing upon the thistle, a national symbol of Scotland, suggests Scotland's broader placement on this border of extremes as well. Interestingly, MacDiarmid creates his own dialect in the poem, one he uses in much of his work in the 1920's, critically referred to as "Synthetic Scots" which borrows from many dialects within the Scottish border (Hart). This dialect reflects a desire to synthesize Scottish language, and consequently Scottish culture, into one fabricated entity. MacDiarmid presents Scotland as having one unified linguistic identity, despite the actuality of the nation's dialectal diversity, reflecting an urge to define Scottishness as one fundamental thing.

A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle has been iconized as quintessentially Scottish in MacDiarmid's effort to define national identity by its contradictions. MacDiarmid makes use of G. Gregory Smith's term "Caledonian antisyzygy" to describe this phenomenon of a Scottish culture split by competing identities. G. Gregory Smith defined the term in his 1919 book *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* where he writes that Scottish literature is marked by its: "almost zigzag of contradictions; a reflection of the contrasts which the Scots shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability" (G. Smith 4). MacDiarmid reflects on G. Gregory Smith's identification of the term in his essay "The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea;" MacDiarmid realizes that much of his own work is rooted in the Scottish antisyzygy, and further that it can be identified across a range of Scottish works ("The Caledonian").

Although the very nature of antisyzygy signals an instability, an inherent inability to exist as one essential thing, the term has been paradoxically stabilized in Scottish literature from its early appearance in Walter Scott to its more modern representations. The phenomenon is observed across a range of Scottish genres and eras; most famously and exemplarily in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which a man's dual nature of good and evil is split in two. In Scottish cinema, being "on the edge" has shown its importance; Michael Powell's 1937 film "The Edge of the World" takes place on an isolated Scottish island where residents are torn generationally between their traditional lives on Hirta and the promise of a better life on the mainland. Even children's literature picks up on the notion of a Scottish split; J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan stories center around a boy who never ages and is forever stuck between child and adult, perhaps reflecting Scotland's struggle as both England's younger sibling and an independent nation. In Barrie's "Peter in Kensington Gardens," Peter is described as existing "betwixt and between," neither really belonging to his biological family or the community of

animals he has found in the gardens (*Peter in Kensington*, 29). The border identity, inherently suggesting volatility, has become a fixture in Scottish literary and cinematic culture, and the maintenance of the border identity has become essential to the stabilization of Scottishness.

The stabilization of the Scottish border identity across national literary history has necessitated the solidification of the identity borders that maintain it. The location of the border identity as “whaur extremes meet” would be nonexistent if the extremes themselves weren’t rigidly defined. Ali Smith, in her awareness of the traditions of border identity, is interested in investigating how a challenge to these borders as they have functioned historically and literarily may be transformative for Scottishness. In her 2012 book *Artful* Smith writes, “Edges are magic, too; there’s a kind of forbidden magic on the border of things, always ceremony in crossing over, even if we ignore it or are unaware of it” (*Artful* 132). Smith revolutionizes borders; she crosses them, ignores them, and has her characters symbolically chain themselves to them, as in her 2017 novel *Winter*. Throughout her work, Smith maintains a careful balance between representing borders as essential to our identities and representing borders as fluid, permeable, and ever-evolving constructions. Although Scottish literary history has imagined an insurmountable contradiction between essentiality and permeability, Smith is able to reconcile the two in her recent novels. Smith liberates her work from rigid borders to display a Scottishness less restricted by categorization, and more open to the incorporation of identities across national divisions.

Smith’s 2012 book *Artful*, a hybrid work of poetry, fiction, and critical essay lays out Smith’s theories on time, on form, and “on edge” in overarching subsections. *Artful*, originally presented by Smith as a series of lectures, falls directly in the middle of Smith’s currently published work, offering a reflection on themes from early novels while also setting the stage for her next era of publications. In the book, the narrator reads through their dead lover’s scholarly

work, often being literally haunted by the presence of this “ghost writer.” The reader is pulled back and forth as Smith traverses across modes and voices, past and present. *Artful* is a manifesto of sorts, identifying Smith’s literary influences and critical perspectives while simultaneously employing them in a fictional narrative. The book not only shows that literary rules can be broken, but revels in their destruction. *Artful* serves as an excellent introduction to Smith’s conventions, specifically Smith’s desire for fluidity both thematically and formally. Her narrator, for example, is ungendered, inviting many equally reasonable imaginings of the story. The narrative form is also permitted a fluidity to transition spontaneously between poetry, essay, and fiction with no obvious restriction to this narrative mobility. The overarching subsections of *Artful* are useful paths for mapping Smith’s crossing of literary borders and can serve to organize how Smith uses the border as a foothold in her thematic and structural innovations despite her ultimate desire to destabilize the border. I will use *Artful*’s framework to support my exploration of four major borders: temporal, formal, national and gender. Though separated into chapters for the purposes of discussion here, these borders are of course overlapping. Although I will organize this project by analyzing each border individually, I hope to strengthen the reading of these borders as interconnected. I will show how Ali Smith’s interest in the border contributes to her vision of a Scotland in which identity is defined by unity, not division, and in which a sense of global community is strengthened.

Beginning at temporal borders, Smith orchestrates a collapse of past and present that compels the reader to draw multidimensional comparisons. Two years after her release of *Artful* Smith published *How to Be Both* (2014), a supernatural novel in which boundaries of time, place, and identity are defined by their permeability. In *How to Be Both*, Smith’s protagonist, Francesco del Cossa, is a transgender painter from the Italian Renaissance whose ghost is pulled into the 21st century when his painting is viewed in a museum by a teenage girl named George. In his

sudden intrusion into the present, Francesco simultaneously traverses temporal and national boundaries. By leading the reader through memories of their dead mothers in *How to Be Both*, both Francesco and George drag the past into the present narrative. In this way the past takes on its own ghostly form in the present. Through Smith's musings "on time" in *Artful*, Smith demonstrates her appreciation of narrative time-travelling and her belief that the past actively exists in the present moment. In fact, Smith expresses her frustration in *Artful* that, "however hard writers might try, there is one feat they cannot achieve, that is to put into writing, in the same tense, two events that have occurred simultaneously" (*Artful* 34). Despite this limitation of tense, Smith weaves past and present together using a number of strategies that reflect a desire to question the independence of different temporal dimensions. Her publishing strategies themselves reflect a desire to question the linearity of time, as the two halves of *How to Be Both* were published in different orders. Although Smith's novels appear to follow linear temporal structures, they break these structures once the reader's expectations have been sufficiently established.

Smith takes many of her time-bending techniques from her two most notable and acknowledged literary ancestors: Virginia Woolf and Muriel Spark. Smith has written extensively on both authors; in 2018 Smith wrote an essay celebrating the centenary of Spark's birth, citing Spark's "uniting, in each individual soul, of paradoxical impossible divisions," as being more so than ever relevant to Smith's work. "I've found I've had the need of Spark like never before," she wrote ("Vital" 1). Smith similarly praises Woolf; in a 2015 interview discussing her construction of *Artful* Smith says, "[Woolf] can, once she has plotted a chronology, do absolutely anything she likes" (Young 138). Like Smith, Woolf and Spark revel in the crossing of literary borders, most influentially in their temporal manipulations. As is illustrated throughout Ali Smith's seasonal quartet, the making and breaking of linear structures

is a trademark of her novels that closely mirror Woolf's own structures. Linear time can be thought of as a border in itself; it directs our movement forward but prevents our crossing into the future or back to the past. In Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando*, for example, the main character Orlando spends the first half of the novel in the Elizabethan era, until he spontaneously transforms into a woman overnight, allowing her to thereafter travel through centuries as if they were days. Just as Ali Smith sets up expectations for seasonal patterns in her quartet of novels, so does Woolf set up temporal expectations with the intent to break them. Ali Smith also uses certain objects or events to anchor her narrative in the present, giving the narrative a freedom to travel far without entirely abandoning structure. This anchoring mirrors that used by Woolf. Woolf's most famous use of anchoring may be by the Big Ben clock tower in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which regulates each character's life on the ground, interrupting their stream of consciousness and pulling them into the linear present. Although Big Ben chimes on time, other clocks in *Mrs. Dalloway* are always late, interrupting Clarissa Dalloway's consciousness in less predictable ways (Brown). Muriel Spark similarly anchors her novels around events or objects, notably the dining table in Spark's 1990 novel *Symposium* which binds an eccentric cast of characters together, or the wedding scene in her 1960 novel *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* from which the reader is always looking forward to or looking back. Like the late clocks in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Spark's anchors ground time unpredictably, drawing characters together from different dimensions and effectively destabilizing any linear passage of time.

This Woolfian disruption of linear time resonates within Ali Smith's destabilization of formal borders as well. In her section "on form" from *Artful* Smith writes, "form is a matter of clear rules and understandings, then. It's a matter of need and expectation" (*Artful* 80). She soon after expresses her understanding that although form has rules: "form must reinvent itself to continue to be meaningful or to continue being able to mean" (*Artful* 84). Smith's 2001 novel

Hotel World champions formal reinvention. Like *Artful*, *Hotel World* is divided into subsections, this time defined by tense: past, present historic, future conditional, perfect, and future in the past. In his book *About Time: Narrative, Fiction, and the Philosophy of Time*, critic Mark Currie writes, “we are misled into a simplified understanding of tense by the schoolroom notion that there are fundamentally three tenses which correspond to the three logical time zones of past, present, and future” (Currie 138). By nuancing the chronology of *Hotel World* with these five tenses, Smith preys on the reader’s expectations that past, present, and future are the three possible settings, as Currie outlines. Smith is interested in setting the reader’s expectations by opening her novel in “past,” but breaks from expectation in her proceeding to the “present historic,” not simply the present. Currie goes on to say that, “the form of the present tense in the English verb, in other words, does not guarantee that the time reference will be in the present. Hence, the newspaper headlines which declares ‘Jim Smith Dies’ uses the present to refer to the past” (Currie 138). In the “present historic,” Smith does just this; she uses the present tense to describe a character in the past. This has the effect of causing some narrative overlaps as two characters may exist both in the past with only tense separating them, or conversely may make use of the same tense but exist in different times. The reader ultimately gains a cohesive picture, but linear chronology is released to the background. In this way, the very grammatical forms and language we use to tell stories are transformed from their purpose of structuring our sentences to structuring entire novels. Smith recognizes how words themselves are complicit in a linearization of time; that the act of reading requires that we absorb one word after another in lines (*Artful* 34). In using tenses and prepositions in these ways to structure her work, Smith revolutionizes their conventional formal purpose, expanding the potential of form itself.

Moving to the national border, Smith’s work engages with a contentious discussion about the process of defining national literature. In the early 2000s, aligning with the release of Smith’s

first major novel *Hotel World*, Scotland had recently begun the process of redefinition after their devolution from English government in 1997, although this devolution was ultimately not realized. In her essay on this era of literary redefinition Joanne Winning writes, “Scotland’s devolution might in fact initiate a radical reconceptualization of how its citizens might be ‘reproduced’ or choose to ‘reproduce’ themselves” (Winning 287). This era in Scottish history, in which Ali Smith was first emerging as a writer, sparked a national conversation on what it meant for literature to be Scottish. In his 2010 essay *Nationalism and Its Discontents: Critiquing Scottish Criticism*, Scottish writer Christopher Whyte lays out the many problems he sees in the contemporary era of national literary discourse. Whyte believes that there is a “Scottish obsession” with writing and critiquing literature through a national lens, and that this obsession is, “an instance of how a minority culture can take the initiative in minoritizing itself even further” (“Nationalism” 25). In this passage, Whyte expresses his belief that this insistence on Scottishness is limiting the contours of literature written within its borders.

Whyte uses the term “Scottish tautology” to define this desire to have texts “be Scottish twice over:” it is not enough for the author to be Scottish, a text must thematically or linguistically be clearly Scottish to gain national importance. According to Whyte, there exists a crucial impasse in this use of the national lens, in that it requires Scottishness to be impossibly and rigidly defined, a task that has become increasingly difficult in the contemporary era. He believes, “as long as texts are primarily filtered in terms of what they express of the national character, or what they can contribute to nation-building, our choices as readers and critics must be fatally blinkered and hemmed in” (“Nationalism” 35). As is demonstrated by her dissolution of formal and identity borders, Smith refuses to be hemmed in.

In a 1995 interview, Smith shows her awareness of this “self-minoritizing” tendency saying, “people are particularly keen to categorize themselves as different... to be Scottish is to

be separate (Gonda 5). Although she recognizes this pattern, Smith's work is a significant departure from this lens in her explicit inclusion of characters that cross national and identity borders. Francesco from *How to Be Both* is a figure that embodies this effort against categorization. In a departure from conventional representations of the border identity, in which characters are restricted by their failure to be just one thing, Francesco is liberated by his ability to "be both." Through her construction of Francesco, Smith transforms the traditional Scottish border identity by returning to the foundations of G. Gregory Smith's definition of antiszygy, a definition that recognizes the adaptability and flexibility of the border identity over the tradition of fixity. In her active self-de-minoritizing of Scottishness, Ali Smith illustrates a revolutionary portrait of fluidity at the national border, a pattern that can be more broadly observed at temporal, formal, and gendered borders as well.

Gender borders are also transformed both in Smith's early novels *Hotel World* (2001) and *Girl Meets Boy* (2007), but also in her more recent novels *How to Be Both* and the seasonal quartet. Her recognition of gender borders, including gender binaries, and simultaneous rejection of these borders is an act that reclaims the Scottish border identity. Importantly, neither G. Gregory Smith's introduction of Caledonian antiszygy nor MacDiarmid's subsequent response incorporate women or queer identities into their characterization of Scottish split identities. In the introduction to his book *Gendering the Nation*, Christopher Whyte says about MacDiarmid's "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle" that: "if the Drunk Man succeeds in standing for his nation, his representation is limited to its male members, and the heterosexual ones at that. MacDiarmid's approach is openly and provocatively sexist" ("Gendering" x). Whyte recognizes that one doesn't have to look far to find evidence that "nationalism is always bad for women" in Scottish literature, or for that matter any national literature, but he also doesn't want to discourage feminist readings of traditional texts or deter readers from noticing how national literature is

changing (“Gendering” ix). By gendering antiszygy and taking up the border identity in new ways, Ali Smith further challenges the Scottish insistence on maintaining categorization. Queer identities, inherent border identities, are employed to aid in this transformation.

Smith’s use of a queerness aligns closely with writer Kaye Mitchell’s definition of in her essay “Queer Metamorphoses;” Mitchell defines it as “an open mesh of possibilities” and “radically indeterminate” (Mitchell 72). In this very definition queerness signifies a rejection of categorization: a permeability, fluidity, and inability to be segregated by borders at all. In other words, by queering her work, Smith sculpts a new vision of antiszygy unregulated by borders, suggesting that the nation can represent multiple identities without instantiating division. Two important characters represent Smith’s ideology on queerness and her belief in the ability to “be both:” Francesco del Cossa in *How to Be Both* and the genderqueer character of Robin in *Girl Meets Boy*. In *Girl Meets Boy*, a modern rewriting of Ovid’s myth of Iphis, queerness is center stage. As Mitchell points out in her essay, although Ovid’s original myth had a binaristic representation of Iphis as girl who completely changes to a boy, Smith’s retelling invites a broader conception of gender, in which Robin and her lover Anthea are “both genders, a whole new gender, no gender at all” (Mitchell 68). Their queerness ultimately opens the door to thousands of border crossings; gods and goddesses appear on earth, fantasy becomes reality, the dead are reincarnated. In Smith’s work, queerness kickstarts a waterfall effect of border disintegration, inviting us to consider the foundation on which these borders are built.

The parallel destruction of gender and temporal borders again demonstrates how the borders identified throughout this project are interconnected. The destabilization of one leads into the breaking of another, and vice versa. The crossing of gender borders in *How to Be Both* and *Girl Meets Boy* again borrows from Virginia Woolf, most significantly *Orlando*, a novel which also straddles centuries, crossing temporal boundaries by means of a genderqueer

character. When Orlando spontaneously transforms into a woman overnight, she is immediately liberated by her newfound ability for nomadism; she flees Constantinople before joining a group of Gypsies and finally returning to England. Once changed into a woman, Orlando expresses interest in men, women, and genderqueer characters, uninhibited by gender or sexual borders (“Talk”). Francesco in *How to Be Both* noticeably mirrors many of the same qualities; his genderqueerness allows him to be both a prominent painter and to make friends and take lovers at a local brothel in Ferrara. His artistry in combination with his queerness unlocks restricted spaces for Francesco; it grants him the trust of the proprietor of the brothel and allows him to traverse through 15th century palaces to modern museums in Cambridge. Both Orlando and Francesco’s queerness allows for an easy transience between physical and multidimensional spaces. Gender borders become porous for them. Identity borders still stand — men, women, and trans characters still exist — but the passage from either side is unrestricted. In inheriting this use of queerness from Woolf, Smith has interrogated gender borders, expanding her portrait of Scottishness to abandon notions of categorization.

The four border types I have presented are deeply interconnected; the breaking of one border invites the destruction of another, such as with temporal and formal borders. What this indirectly achieves is an interrogation of one of our most fundamental borders; death. Death is of great interest to Smith because the crossing of this border both relies on and necessitates the destruction of other borders. It becomes the ultimate form of border crossing. The intrusion of the ghost, often an embodied figure from the past, breaks temporal borders in its transience between past and present, and breaks national borders in its freedom to traverse country lines. Even formal borders are broken when the present tense is used to describe ghosts from the past; when the paranormal appears and is described in the present as it is happening, the ghost is grounded in the present narrative. Smith delights in the supernatural to some extent in all her

novels, and it's grown to symbolize Smith's desire to reveal a greater connection between individuals and with the past.

Over the past four years, Smith has released a novel annually, each novel uniquely addressing how temporal and national borders regulate our lives. Released in 2016, *Autumn*, deals with the consequences of Brexit through the story of two eccentric neighbors. Although *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer* introduce new casts of characters, the novels remain deeply entwined. In structuring her quartet seasonally, Smith encourages the reader anticipate the cyclical pattern of time, setting up expectations for what will come next. Smith is highly attuned to this anticipation; in *Artful* she writes, "I'd wondered if the seasons would ever be new again, brand-new time, rather than just seem to be following each other nose to tail like paint-peeling wooden horses on an old carousel" (*Artful* 5). Smith understands our expectations of each seasonal cycle as a renewal, but she herself sees the seasons as peeling carousel horses, going around in circles without truly changing. As often as we watch the spinning of the carousel, we still ask ourselves questions such as "will winter ever end?" or "when will summer come?" Although Smith sets our expectations for a familiar, predictable, cyclical pattern in the titling of her quartet, she diverges significantly from linear time in the actual text. In *Autumn*, for example, one of the main characters, 101 year old Daniel Gluck, pulls the reader back and forth from the present day to Nazi-occupied Paris, and similarly from dream to reality. *Autumn*, in addition to the other novels in the seasonal quartet, hardly respects the confines of its season. The "instability of self" that Marina Warner identifies in Ali Smith's work extends beyond the interiority of Smith's characters to the form of the quartet itself, as the boundaries of season and time are intentionally porous. By grounding Smith's interrogation of borders in the context of Scotland, I identify how these challenges to traditional constructions of nationality encourage our reconsideration of national belonging. In framing an analysis of Smith's works around the

seasons, I address how Smith uses the reader's expectations on form, time, and character — national, and otherwise delimited, in order to break these expectations, establishing new orders and imagining a future less determined by the borders dividing us.

CHAPTER 1: AUTUMN

“Is it time that translates our lives into sequence, into meaning? Does sequence mean that things mean? Sequence will always be most of the word consequence” (*Artful* 21).

When the two main characters in the Ali Smith’s 2016 novel *Autumn* first meet for one of their walks, Daniel Gluck asks then eleven-year-old Elisabeth to imagine a collage in her head based off his description. Daniel begins, “The background is rich dark blue, a blue much darker than the sky... On top of the moon, bigger than the moon there’s a cut-out black and white lady wearing a swimsuit, cut from a newspaper or a fashion magazine” (*Autumn* 73). This description simultaneously asks both Elisabeth and the reader to construct the Pauline Boty collage in their mind, piecing together the different elements of paint, paper, and lace that make up the collage into one cohesive mental image. *Autumn* itself similarly encourages readers to create their own collages of Smith’s characters, building their identities from the scraps we receive of their actions, dreams, and histories. These collages, in their different mediums, colors, and textures signify an expansion of the border identity; not only do we not we fail to exist as any one thing, we are entirely uncategorizable.

Autumn opens in a dreamscape. Without having any introduction to his character, we are thrown into the imagination of 101-year-old Daniel Gluck as he rests in a “increased sleep period” at a senior care facility. This kind of opening, that drags the reader straight into the narrative depths without any context, is a trademark of Ali Smith’s work, reminiscent of Muriel Spark’s opening in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*. Although in the present moment of *Autumn* Daniel is too old to physically move from his bed, his imaginative travelling through his own thoughts and histories gives the story a dimensionality which expands the possibilities of the present moment. Through the character of Elisabeth, we are likewise given a character with

whom the reader can traverse the narrative. When we first meet Elisabeth in her twenties, she is frustrated by the result of Brexit and struggling to make her face fulfill the impossible requirements for her new passport photo. Elisabeth's relationship with Daniel, and the story of them meeting when she was a child, is soon after revealed to the reader. Although Smith could have narrated Elisabeth and Daniel's meeting in the past tense (i.e., "Elisabeth and Daniel met when she was a child"), her narrating the memory in the present puts these two dimensions on equal narrative playing fields, entwining the past with the present narrative.

In *Autumn*, the past is woven seamlessly into the present, and is often initially indistinguishable from the narrative taking place in the present. One section at the end of the book, for example, begins with the sentence, "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" (*Autumn* 181). The subsequent pages describe a conversation between Daniel's dead little sister and his past lover, neither of whom, as we know at this point in the story, have ever met one another in real life. In this abrupt transition from the present, specifically Elisabeth's point of view, to a passage originating from Daniel's consciousness that questionably has no basis in reality, the reader is left unsure of the timeline of events and their actuality. Smith doesn't shy away from this uncertainty. In a scene that makes use of similar patterns, Daniel, still in his nursing home bed, imagines himself as being stuck within in a tree. While still in the imagined tree, he dips out of that image and into a memory of Christine Keeler first trying on a suit of armor to amuse the current war minister, then testifying in front of court about their subsequent affairs. Not staying long, Daniel finally moves from that memory into another, this time he is with his sister Hannah on a train, but as Smith reminds us, Daniel is ultimately still an "old man confined in the bed in the tree" (*Autumn* 99). What Smith does here in *Autumn*, and what she has done in each of her novels, is allow for and even encourage a confusion of past and present,

dream and reality. The borders that maintain linearity are abandoned, and the reader must accept that time works differently in the novel altogether. Time passes not in minutes, days, or even seasons, but in the opening of “a million billion” flower heads, or events — the remembrance of a sex scandal which rocked the country. In a moment of imagery that so aptly symbolizes Smith’s aims in terms of her dealings with temporal borders, Daniel at the request of Elisabeth throws his watch into the river, and Elisabeth notes that “only she and Daniel know the enormity of what he’d just done” (Autumn 76). *Autumn* is a great representative of Smith’s belief that “now” is not so separate from “then.”

Although all seasons denote a sort of change, from hot to cold, from life to death, one season symbolizes transformation more than the others: autumn. The vibrant display of fall foliage is perhaps the most visible manifestation of change, bridging the gap between two extremes. In overlaying the pattern of the seasons onto our own life cycles, autumn reflects our gradually approach to death, moving closer with every passing year. In autumn, we recognize our own lives as an eternal fall, always in a state of transformation that will end eventually in our meeting of the ultimate border. In beginning her seasonal quartet in autumn, Smith positions us in preparation of our symbolic death in winter, yet we are somehow revived on the other side, resurfacing in spring. Passing through the border into winter does not trap the reader there, likewise Smith’s characters pass through borders with hopes of crossing over again. Smith allows us to reappear on the other side, and in doing so allows each season to lead easily into another.

Autumn is rooted in much of the symbolic value of its namesake, representing the possibility for a return across the border. In order to achieve this passing and returning over the border, Smith relies on many of the anchoring techniques of Woolf and Spark. This is certainly the case in *How to Be Both*; functioning in much the same way as the clock tower in *Mrs.*

Dalloway, the sound of a blackbird allows Francesco to wander freely through his memory and back to the present. Smith's transitions between paragraph often hold these abrupt changes in time; in one passage Francesco describes, "I was left bruised, yes, but from the swift activities of our love... and so with dignity through the birdsong. The blackbird in the hedge now stops his song: he darts off out and up with a chirrup and flurry cause the boy shifts" (*How to Be*, 27). The sound of the birdsong in this passage acts as an anchor between the life of Francesco in the 15th century and George's life in the present day. Through this one sound that reverberates through past and present, Francesco finds a foothold to move seamlessly between the two eras. The scenes that bookend this passage therefore have an arbitrary order in the novel; Smith could just as easily place Francesco with George initially, then use the birdsong to pull Francesco into the past. The multiple potentials of this birdsong reflect a larger potential for the narrative as a whole. Both *Autumn* and *How to Be Both* could be reordered in thousands of ways, a realization that supports Smith's larger portrait of the collage identity. Even if the pieces of the story get switched around, as they do in the two interchangeable halves of *How to Be Both*, like a collage they will still manage to form a cohesive whole, albeit redefined in every reordering.

Smith's interest in death as a border is strongly represented in the building of Daniel's interiority. As one of Daniel's nursing home aides tells Elisabeth, Daniel has entered an increased sleep period, moving gradually closer to death every day. For Smith, although Daniel has not fully crossed over this border, his proximity to death is enough to destabilize the line between the living and the dead. As we will see in her last installment in the quartet, *Summer*, Daniel's dead sister appears to him in this sleep period, suggesting that Daniel is somehow able to reach over the border in his communications with death. This scene represents the permeability of this and other borders. Because of Daniel's destabilization of borders with the supernatural in his conversing with death, other borders begin to dissolve as well, most notably

temporal borders. In the middle of *Autumn* is a section set in Nice, France at two points in time: 2015 and 1943. The section opens: “It was a typically warm Monday late in September 2015...People out on the street were staring at the exterior of the Palais de la Préfecture where a long red banner with a swastika at the top of it has coursed down the length of the front of the building...It was just a film production” (*Autumn* 63). This is soon contrasted two paragraphs later with a section with the same opening line, but in a different time, and with different implications of the hanging swastika; in 1943, Daniel’s sister Hannah walked out on a “typically warm Monday late in September” only to be corralled by Nazi soldiers into the back of a truck with other Jewish women. Once Smith has grounded the narrative in a place, as she has done in this passage with Nice, Smith gains a freedom to travel temporally. This freedom gives power to memory in defining the present moment. By rewriting this history from 1943 into the present tense, Smith is allowing memory to dimensionalize the present. In thinking of the issue of Brexit which looms over *Autumn*, Smith seems to be calling for a multidimensional analysis of the present debate in a way that brings forth past historical events to illustrate the consequences of the xenophobia and discrimination. By having Daniel lead us into Nazi-occupied France, Smith drags the past forward to remind us of the relevance of our past horrors and how we shouldn’t forget them in our current constructions of “Britishness” or “Scottishness.” Smith demonstrates how incomplete it would be to isolate our present identities from our histories.

In her crafting of Daniel’s imagination, Smith establishes that proximity to the border of death is often enough to allow for spontaneous crossings and recrossings. *Autumn* provides other examples of how characters can cross this border, allowing for a communication with the dead, or conversely allowing the dead to reach out to the living. Grief, an overwhelming connection to someone on the other side, brings the border into arms reach. This is true for Daniel, who often travels back in his memory to visit Hannah, his little sister who Daniel saw as impossibly and

untouchably brilliant. Similarly, one of the main characters in *How to Be Both*, a teenage girl named George, invites a relationship with the supernatural because of her unbearable grief for her recently dead mother. George easily slips into the memories she shares with her mother, giving her mother a larger foothold in the present narrative. Through her grief, George becomes more comfortable in her proximity to death, seeming to invite Francesco's intrusion into the present, ultimately suggesting that George's temporal crossings into the past encourage other borders to be broken. *Autumn* and *How to Be Both* similarly imagine a diversity of border crossings, contributing to Ali Smith's larger goal of bringing the past closer to us. *Autumn* and *How to Be Both* highlight Smith's careful manipulation of time, and more specifically her belief that time can be broken, transformed, and reworked to better convey the inherent dimensionality of the present.

CHAPTER 2: WINTER

“Form is a matter of clear rules and unspoken understandings, then. It’s a matter of need and expectation. It is also a matter of breaking rules, of dialogue, crossover between forms. Through such dialogue and argument, form, the shaper and molder, acts like the thing called the mold, endlessly breeding forms and forms.” (*Artful* 68)

“God was dead: to begin with. And romance was dead. Chivalry was dead....Love was dead. Death was dead. A great many things were dead. Some, though, weren’t, or weren’t yet dead” (*Winter* 3). The second of Ali Smith’s seasonal quartet, *Winter* (2017), introduces mortality as a key theme in the opening sentence. Like a late autumn leaf, life has disintegrated as the reader has moved into the second novel. From their very reading of the title, some thematic expectation relating to the seasons is awakened in the reader; in *Winter*, most probably, the expectation of death. Smith, however, has no intention of preserving these expectations. As we soon learn in *Winter*, many of the dead things listed in the opening passage come back to life, perhaps never having been truly dead. By taking advantage of the seasons in organizing her quartet, Smith makes an investment in our certainties about how time structures our lives, wanting us to trust in our expectations only to ultimately break them.

In *Winter*, Smith’s disruption of formal borders breathes life into the narrative, breaking rules relating to grammar and genre in order to challenge our understanding of the dead as isolated from us. Formal rules of tense and syntax are particularly permeable in Smith’s literary universe; by a simple reordering of letters or use of pun, Smith creates minor formal disruptions that have major thematic consequences. As in *Autumn*, tense serves as an important tool for

Smith to manage multiple temporalities, often inviting a narrative perspective that unites characters interdimensionally. In this way, parallel temporal and formal destabilizations work to highlight the overlap between our lives and the lives of others. From the beginning of *Winter*, Smith litters the narrative with wordplay and pun, gifting sentences with double meanings that question the boundaries inherent in a single word. This intra-word multiplicity is a pattern originating from one of Smith's first novels, *Hotel World* (2001) in which one of the central narrators, the ghost of a girl who died in a hotel, struggles to hold onto her rapidly disintegrating language capability. As her memory of language leaves her, this ghost replaces the word "word" with "world," a substitution inviting imagery of expansion: a "world inside a word." The formal disintegration of language in *Winter* and *Hotel World* opens the door to a greater disruption of formal borders relating to genre.

In this chapter, *Winter*, *Hotel World*, and Smith's 2005 novel *The Accidental* are used to discuss how Smith bridges the genre borders of surreality and reality in order to invite a greater feeling of connection toward our families, strangers, and communities. The term surreal has been used historically to characterize the "anti-rational:" dream-like thoughts and images which challenge the borders of the real, often reflecting our unconscious desires. In literature, the surrealist movement is often reflected in a broken, unintelligible style that encourages the "free association of images" and unbidden drawing of connection between objects, people, and places. Beyond the broken syntax, surrealist literature is also characterized by extended dream sequences that bring together juxtaposing images, exemplified by the "word-world" interplay in *Winter* (Baldrick 1). In Smith's work, particularly *Winter*, *Hotel World*, and *The Accidental*, a surrealist style is often employed in passages that border life and death. The deterioration of

language seems to mirror the deterioration of life, giving the reader the sense that Smith character's weave back and forth across this border. In addition to the surrealist style of her language, Smith also introduces several characters that display certain surreal qualities; embodying many juxtaposing characteristics, defying boundaries of knowledge, and prompting other characters to question if their presence is not just a dream. These three novels each incorporate surreal figures, notably all homeless or otherwise dislodged women, who encapsulate many knowledges and are unwittingly able to guide fellow characters toward a better course. These surreal figures, in their temporary interaction with the core cast of characters, remind the other characters of their place in a larger web of life separate from their own individual courses.

This reminder of our existence on a global scale is fundamental to Smith's work; in the first few pages of *Hotel World*, the ghost of Sara Wilby confesses how much she misses the details of life saying, "a mouthful of dust would be something...the rolled up hairs and dried stuff and specks of what-once-was-skin, all the glamorous leavings of breathing creatures ground down to essence" (*Hotel World* 5). Sara's ghost expresses how much she yearns for this intimacy with other people. Smith transforms dust, typically an object of disgust, into something representative of the interconnectedness between other living people, and between the living and the dead. Now that Sara is dead, she would "give anything to taste. To taste dust." Importantly, Smith's inclusion of the phrase "to taste dust" not only represents her thematic purposes surrounding interconnection, but also draws on the metaphorical understanding of "tasting dust" as signifying death. Sara's desire for "a mouthful of dust" therefore reflects both a need for intimacy and her increasing proximity to death as she slowly fades from life. In her novels,

Smith too encourages the reader to “taste the dust:” to imagine oneself existing in a broader web of life, one that is rooted on a global and inter-dimensional foundation.

Smith’s interest in crafting these webs is best represented in one of the last sections of *Hotel World*. This final passage is from the perspective of a camera, zooming in and out of scenes that cross temporal and national borders, resting its eye on “the ghost of Diana,” “the killing of Caesar,” a “child actor who died aged *scarse thirteene* nearly four hundred years ago,” and “the lady who cleans the steps every morning, and the paving outside with the word *Global* tiled into it.” (*Hotel World* 227-231). The perspective of this camera, although centered in one place, allows us to envision the nation on a global and interdimensional scale. Through her straddling of formal borders, Smith achieves this broadened perspective within single words and sentences. The playfulness with grammar and genre in *Winter*, *Hotel World*, and *The Accidental* gives an overall impression that both individual words and individual people are not contained within themselves. Both the novel use of tense and the establishment of surreal characters remind us of our existential overlap with other people, regardless of time or geographic place. In asking us to “taste the dust,” Smith encourages us to treasure this web of intimacy with strangers, challenging us to reimagine our identities from this expanded perspective.

In *Winter*, Art engages the help of a homeless woman, Lux, to act in the place of his girlfriend during his visit to his mother’s for Christmas. The conversation between Lux and Art on the train ride to his mother’s house is riddled with puns and wordplay; when Art says to Lux, “you know, specific local language. Idiolect,” Lux responds, “what did you just call me?” (*Winter* 80). The exchange is important because it signifies Art’s underestimation of Lux’s intelligence, as he maintains throughout much of the novel. The word “idiolect” from that

moment on becomes multi-layered; it is used interchangeably with “idiot,” but also specifically calls back to this feeling of intellectual superiority. Later in the novel Art thinks to himself, “He has been an idiot to bring anyone, an idiot to come, himself, at all. Not an idiot. An idiolect. That’s what he is, a language no one else alive in the world speaks. He is the last living speaker of himself” (*Winter* 97). “Idiolect,” serves as an example of what the many puns in *Winter* achieve, a flexibility within words themselves. This playful form adds depth to the novel in its ability to amplify meaning, and in its ability to grant words themselves a sort of flexibility. In musing about his blog, Art thinks, “That’s what winter is: an exercise in remembering how to still yourself then how to come pliantly back to life again” (*Winter* 66). In *Winter*, Smith is interested in representing a season with pliancy: an ability to pass over the border into death and return again. By creating forms that themselves have pliancy, as she does with her frequent punning, Smith bolsters these thematic efforts.

Winter frequently reorders words to give us new ways to look at them; Art, for example observes that his mother Sophia is strikingly like his aunt Iris saying, “but they are, in the strangest ways, how they sniff and move about, his aunt the image of his mother but his mother magnified, as if fulfilled. No, filled full” (*Winter* 154). The simple reordering of “fulfilled” presents new imagery; not only is Iris “fulfilled” in the conventional way — satisfied with her life’s work — she is “filled full” — brimming with life, loudly and vibrantly, a distinct contrast from her sister. Later in *Winter*, the addition of a single hyphen within a word cracks open an entirely new understanding. At an undisclosed time in the future a child asks Art, “what’s to-day?” (*Winter* 223). The child is frustrated by Art’s answer that “today is today” and continues, “but why, when it sounds the same, is it not the same as to run or to do or to eat...and if it was the

same, how would you day? I want to day” (*Winter* 225). In this passage, the word “today” as it is conventionally used is transformed. Its possible meaning in the novel, and perhaps in the quartet as a whole, is expanded. In drawing attention to how words can absorb meaning, as she does with “fulfill” and “today,” Smith highlights the potential for all words to extend beyond their formal borders. In her de-limitation of words throughout the quartet, Smith reminds us of the potential of form to shape new, broader, interpretations dependent on individual readership.

This interest in grammar, and how the twisting of grammatical borders can unlock the potential of language, is a characteristic tracing back to an early Smith novel, *Hotel World*. The five main characters in *Hotel World* orbit around the Global Hotel, a transitory setting in which people both dead and alive, existing both in the future and the past, filter in and out, unified by their incidental overlap in one geographic place. Each character narrates a section named after a particular tense. Sara Wilby, for example, the ghost of whom narrates the “past” section of *Hotel World*, dies falling down a dumb waiter shaft at the hotel. As the novel progresses, Sara’s ghost begins to fade away, reflected in a deterioration of her narration:

Here’s the story.

Remember you must live.

Remember you most love.

Remainder you mist leaf.

(I will miss mist. I will miss leaf. I will miss the, the. What’s the word? Lost, I’ve, the word. The word for. You know. I don’t mean a house. I don’t mean a room.

I mean the way of the . Dead to the . Out of this . Word. I am hanging
falling breaking between this word and the next.

Time me would you?

You. Yes you. It's you I'm talking to. (*Hotel World* 30-31).

As the ghost of Sara disintegrates from the living world, so does her formal language. Notably, Sara's broken narration reflects the broader patterns of surrealism at play in Smith's work, specifically in the juxtaposition of images such as "life" and "leaf" as well as "word" and "world." Mark Currie in his essay, "Ali Smith and the Philosophy of Grammar," writes on this passage: "the world falls out of her sentences as she falls out of the world" ("Ali Smith" 60). The "word" interestingly replaces "world" in her sentences, burdening "word" with a broadened meaning of inherent multiplicity. In this passage, Smith's substitution of "world" with "word" alludes to a similar substitution in James Joyce's *Ulysses*: "I called you a naughty boy because I did not like that other world" (Joyce, 74). Like this passage from *Winter*, this line from *Ulysses* drastically alters the possibilities of this sentence with the suggestion that words can be productive of worlds outside of themselves. By making this substitution in *Winter*, Smith makes an allusion that adds another dimension to this formal device, calling back to influences such as Joyce in a way that reminds the reader of how quartet is connected to a broader literary history. The word-world interplay suggests the possibility of many places, people, and writers contained within a word.

The formal boundaries in this passage are stretched visually as well. In the gaps within these sentences, the reader can imagine Sara falling, as she fell down the dumb waiter to her

death, in a “breakdown of life and leaf” (“Ali Smith” 60). In the last sentence before Sara is lost from the narrative she calls out to us, the reader: “You. Yes you. It’s you I’m talking to.” As these formal borders crumble, Sara breaks through the 4th wall to speak directly to us, the only time this happens in the novel. The linguistic disintegration shown in this passage interestingly doesn’t occur immediately following her fall down the dumb waiter; Sara’s ghost is able to visit her own corpse, her sister, and her love interest before she becomes truly lost to the narrative. This exemplifies another way Smith questions the definitive border of death. Just as the dead things in the opening of *Winter* resurrect themselves in the narrative, so does Sara live on in some capacity even after her death in the Global Hotel; it is only after Sara loses words that she disappears from the narrative. In this way Smith recognizes a tension between living and writing, as Sara’s sister Clare will grapple with at the end of the novel. In giving voice to a dead character, Smith represents the permeability of both mortal and formal borders. Although these borders remain permeable, language remains elusive in Sara’s inability to hold onto it.

The visual destruction of formal borders in *Hotel World* extends beyond Sara Wilby. After Sara’s narration in the “past,” Else, a homeless woman who lives on the street outside the Global Hotel, takes up narration in the “present historic.” As Else panhandles outside the Global, her request for spare change punctuates her stream of consciousness; she repeats, “Spr sm chn?” until a hotel worker, Lise, steps outside to ask her if she wants a room for the night. The shortening of “spare some change” into only its most necessary letters serves as a great example of how Smith’s formal manipulations shape meaning. Ignored by passersby and sick with an illness that makes breathing and speaking difficult, Else’s filleted speech forms a visual representation of her reduced voice and power. While on the street Else thinks, “She doesn’t

need vowels either. She knows all kinds of shorthand. She imagines the pavement littered with the letters that fall out of the half-words she uses...I'll clear up after me" (*Hotel World* 47). Else herself draws the conclusion that her broken speech reflects the impact of her words; her words literally become trash covering the street. Else herself wants to clear away the litter of her words so others don't interact with them. The departure from formal spelling rules in Else's section of *Hotel World* showcases the formal techniques Smith employs in her seasonal quartet to expand the possibilities of language.

Ali Smith's rupturing of formal borders asks the reader to look beyond the page: to think about the way we hear words, speak them, and mold them to our own purposes. Smith encourages us to consider our own consumption of language, particularly in the act of reading. In the second to last section of *Hotel World*, Sara Wilby's sister, Clare, narrates in "future in the past." This tense again emphasizes the crossover between the 5 narrators; Clare's "future in the past" has the potential to overlap with Sara's "past" or Lise's "future conditional," and so on. Clare's grief is rooted in her frustration of how Sara's future, which had so much potential in the past, has now been taken away. Clare uses an analogy to describe the loss of her sister saying:

It is like reading a book yeah like say you were reading a book any book & you were halfway through it really into the story knowing all about the characters & all the stuff that's happening to them then you turn the next page over & halfway down the page it just goes blank it stops there just aren't any more words on its & you know for sure that when you picked this book up it wasn't like that is was like a normal book & had an end

a last chapter a last page all that but no you flick through it right to the end & it's all just blank nothing to tell you (*Hotel World* 190)

In this passage, Smith draws our attention to a tension between living and writing. As Currie writes in his essay: “there is, in other words, no possible analogy between the visible materiality of what is to come in writing and its invisibility in life” (“Ali Smith” 58). By organizing *Hotel World* by tense, Smith attempts to bridge this tension by more closely representing how death interrupts our plans; she clearly shows us that Sara’s open future is now a thing of the past. Just as Clare imagines in this passage, Sara literally falls off the page in a “WOoOoo-hooooo-oo-o” that trickles down the last page of the novel” (*Hotel World* 237). In the confusion of temporalities in the novel, one narrator’s “present” crosses over with another’s “past” or “future in the past,” making it difficult for the reader to distinguish the exact points that their lives touch one another. All the reader is left with is of an impression of their overlap: the acceptance that, although inexact, everyone who passes through the Global Hotel is sure to in some way have a role in the larger narrative web. Conventional rules of grammar are twisted to better highlight how our lives straddle multiple temporalities, often entwining themselves with the lives of strangers.

Although *Winter* is not structured by tense as in *Hotel World*, entwining temporal narratives are still fundamental to this novel’s structure. The way Smith centers “Christmas day” in *Winter* exemplifies the importance of this temporal overlap. Just as Woolf uses clock chimes to pivot temporally in *Mrs. Dalloway*, so does Smith use “Christmas day” to time-travel through Art’s life, even showing us memories of which Art has no memory. Smith first places us in the

present “Christmas day,” and we watch Sophia cradle the Barbara Hepworth sculpture in her arms. In the next few pages, however, the clock chimes and the narrator takes us to “see another Christmas,” one that reveals that Art momentarily lived with Iris as a child. Using “Christmas day” in this way emphasizes Art’s connection with his aunt Iris, even if it’s not a memory that Art himself shares. The passage reveals that the lives of Art and Iris have greater overlap than originally known to Art, and that Art’s existence extends past the borders of which he himself is aware. This temporal structuring encourages our feeling of intimacy towards people we may not have considered close to us. In using the chiming clock as a regulator for narrative transitions, Smith destabilizes more than just temporal borders, however. The allusion to Woolf is itself a border-breaking device in many ways. The novels of the seasonal quartet reject any sort of limitation to their individual novels, and similarly Smith’s novels each draw heavily on material outside of themselves. In her breakdown of formal genre borders, Smith continues to uphold this theme of de-limitation.

Beyond grammar and wordplay, Smith is interested in testing the formal borders of genre. It is difficult to generically categorize the work of Ali Smith; while her stylistic devices (allusion, multiple points of view, punning) can certainly be traced across novels, her use of genre is more fluid and radically changes within a single work. In his essay “Narrating Reminders,” Stephen Levin cites Smith’s “fusion of genres,” notably realism and fantasy, as inviting the appearance of ghostly spectres into her novels. According to Levin, Smith’s breaking of the formal borders of genre work to draw figures back across the border of death (Levin). In returning back to *Winter*, we can observe Smith’s shift between genre, but may struggle to identify the exact borders between them. This pattern begins at the beginning of *Winter* when

Sophia is first introduced: “Good morning, Sophia Cleves said. Happy day-before Christmas. She was speaking to the disembodied head. It was the head of a child, just a head, no body attached, floating by itself in mid air” (*Winter* 7). The head that appears before Sophia has aspects of the surreal, as Sophia herself compares the head to an art installation “like Dalí.” In the middle of the novel, however, Sophia notices that the head has transformed: “the head wasn’t really a head anymore. It now had no face. It had no hair. It was heavy as stone. It was smooth all over...She didn’t really know what to call it now, head?” (*Winter* 141). The disembodied head has transformed into a marble sphere, losing its ability to float suspended in the air. Although it is later revealed in *Winter* that the marble sphere is part of a Barbara Hepworth sculpture, a real object that Sophia took from a past lover, we are uncertain about when this floating head makes its transformation, and when it passes from surreal into the real.

A similar surreal interruption happens to Art; while at the dining table with Sophia, Iris, and Lux, he suddenly sees a piece of hanging landscape above him: “he looks up. A foot and a half above their heads, floating, precarious, suspended by nothing, a piece of rock or a slab of landscape roughly the size of a small car or a grand piano is hanging there in the air” (*Winter* 215). Lux later tells him that he fainted at the dinner table following this scene. When Art scratches his head, however, he still finds grit in his hair that crumbled off the piece of landscape. Smith provides no further clarity on the scene, and this sense of uncertainty between reality and surreality follows Art for much of *Winter*. As we learn throughout the novel, Art has been fabricating posts on his blog “Art in Nature,” saying that he has spotted the “mythical Canada warbler” while in Cornwall. As a result of his post, a bus load of tourists flock to Sophia’s home to try to get a sight of the bird, and surprisingly are able to make verifiable

sightings. Art's myth, once it gains an audience, becomes reality. Later in the novel, Sophia admits to Lux that she has difficulty determining if she is hallucinating things or not. Specifically she mentions her uncertainty that the hyper-armed policemen she sees on the train concourse are real. Lux argues that what she'd seen had been "a hallucination, not a real thing," to which Sophia responds, "where would we be without our ability to see beyond what it is we're supposed to be seeing?" (*Winter* 287). In these series of scenes bordering the real and the surreal, Smith shows us how crossing the two genres encourages our ability to "see beyond," to notice when our realities seem unreal or somehow extend beyond themselves.

In addition to surreal objects, surreal characters are important elements to many of Ali Smith's novels. Smith's surreal characters are characters that defy boundaries of knowledge, that become almost mythical in the way they flit in and out of the narrative, making the reader question these characters' very existence in the reality. Lux from *Winter* is a strong example of Smith's surreal character. After randomly observing Lux on the street, Art invites her to take Charlotte's place on this trip to his mother's. Lux constantly defies Art's expectations from their first encounter. In one scene, Lux recounts the plot of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, a play which is also alluded to several times in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. While Lux converses with Sophia Art thinks to himself, "Oh God. To make herself seem more like the imagined Charlotte, presumably, Lux is making up a terrible bland fairytale plot that's nothing like Shakespeare and pretending it's Shakespeare" (*Winter* 198). Art cannot believe that Lux could be more knowledgeable than himself in an area of his own expertise. Her boundary-defying knowledge, however, extends beyond this coincidental understanding of *Cymbeline*. Lux not only shatters Art's expectations of her intelligence, but the general expectations of the type of understanding a

stranger could possibly have when conversing with a group of estranged relatives. Lux is able to get Sophia to eat when Art fails and to tell her about Art's real father. She understands Sophia's references to artists and is able to bridge the gap beyond his Aunt Iris and Sophia in a matter of days, a feat Art has been unable to achieve over a lifetime. In her brief meeting over Christmas, Lux has unlocked knowledge that was previously unattainable, appearing momentarily in the lives of the Cleves family before disappearing overnight like a dream.

Else in *Hotel World* similarly surprises another character with her intellect. Like Art, these characters refuse to believe that the homeless women they encounter could be smarter than themselves. The transitory nature of homeless women in *Winter* and *Hotel World*, which prevents them from staying permanently in either the Cleves family home or the Global Hotel, seems to also allow them to acquire knowledge beyond the boundaries that limit other characters. Importantly, the surreal qualities of Lux and the other surreal figures seems to be targeted towards the specific domestic unit at the center of the novel. In *Winter*, for example, Lux becomes a near mythical figure for Art because she seems to have a much better understanding of the subjects that Art prides himself on. Similarly, Lux has knowledge of art that endears her to Sophia, and radical worldviews which tie her to Sophia. What makes Lux's knowledge so surreal is not that it originates from a homeless woman, but that her knowledge fills the exact gaps desired by the Cleves family. Lux's presence in exactly the right family, and her ability to guide that family to a better understanding of each other, has a very surreal quality in *Winter* because of its impossible specificity.

This surreal stranger, who emerges from the margins of the central domestic unit, is a figure that repeats itself throughout the work of Ali Smith. In Smith's 2005 novel, *The*

Accidental, a stranger named Amber walks into the Smart family's vacation home one summer and profoundly affects each of their lives. Amber, like Lux, has an air of mystery about her. Patrick O'Donnell writes in his essay "'The Space that Wrecks Our Abode': The Stranger in Ali Smith's *Hotel World* and *The Accidental*" that Amber is "the multifarious embodiment of 'knowledges' — sexual, historical, biological, public, identificatory" and that her knowledge "has been randomly acquired and spontaneously imparted, yet apt to each individual in the Smart family she encounters" (O'Donnell 98). This description applies perfectly to Lux as well as Amber, as both have the juxtaposing abilities to both adapt themselves perfectly to a person's needs while remaining almost a total stranger. At the end of both *Winter* and *The Accidental*, the surreal figures vanish completely from the family's lives, yet in their brief encounter they have transformed that family. After Amber's departure from the Smart family, Magnus, the oldest child, is able to face his involvement in a classmate's suicide. Eve, the mother of the Smart children, becomes herself an intrusive stranger, as Amber was to her, when she leaves her children to travel solo. Michael, the father, is forced to reckon with his abusive behavior toward his students, and Astrid, the youngest, has learned to better manage the change in her family. In *Winter*, Lux similarly strengthens the relationship between Iris, Sophia, and Art and spurs Arts' reconnection with Charlotte. O'Donnell compares *The Accidental* and *Hotel World*: "Amber's presence, like Sara's accident, leads to the spontaneous creation of community of strangers" (O'Donnell 99). Although the Smart family are not technically strangers, they are strangers to each other at the beginning of *The Accidental*. These surreal figures, who straddle the borders of genre in Smith's novels, have a unique ability to unite people.

In moving toward *Spring*, we question how we will emerge from *Winter*, especially given how Smith has complicated our understanding of death as irreversible. In analyzing the breaking of formal borders in *Winter*, Smith's investment in the theme of de-limitation is revealed. In the three novels discussed here, Smith has illustrated her desire for her readers to gain a better sense of intimacy with strangers, and to feel more connected with individuals across a diversity of structural and identity borders. Smith rejects the structural containment of her work to their individual novels, and in doing so encourages her readers to think beyond their own containments, placing themselves within a more extensive web of identity. The thematic importance of this de-containment serves as an important foundation for the discussion of immigration in the third installment of the seasonal quartet, in which our understanding of "stranger" is further interrogated. In broadening our sense of connection with our past and with each other in the first two novels of the seasonal quartet, Smith primes us for the rebuilding of national identity to come in *Spring*.

CHAPTER 3: SPRING

“Crossing a border is not a simple thing. Geopolitically, getting anywhere round the world in which we live now requires a constant producing of proof of identity. Who are you? You can’t cross till we’re sure. When we know, then we’ll decide whether you can or not” (*Artful* 131)

Scattered throughout *Spring* are the diary entries of a young girl named Florence, the daughter of an undocumented immigrant. In one of these entries Florence writes about her passport: “I’m not surprised you want my face. It’s the face of now. What I mean by my face is the face on the A4 photocopy, the proof I exist. Without it I officially don’t. Even though I’m bodily here, without this piece of paper I’m not. If I lose it, wherever I am I won’t be anywhere” (*Spring* 125). In this passage, Florence has identified the importance of nationality in the shaping of our existence. As Florence recognizes, without these national borders she “officially” belongs nowhere. In this third installment in her seasonal quartet, Smith takes on the national border to investigate the nature of its transformative capabilities, specifically in how it dictates the amount of power afforded to citizens and immigrants. Through the entwining stories of Richard, a grieving screenwriter and Brit, a worker at a British detention center, Smith grounds Scotland in a conversation on how immigrants fit into the national framework. *Spring*, in its dialogue with the other three novels in the quartet, encourages a vision of Scotland rooted in permeability rather than exclusivity. Through *Autumn* and *Winter*, I have highlighted how Smith’s breaking of literary borders strengthens our sense of connection across temporal and formal borders. In this chapter, I address how this literary destabilization impacts Smith’s deconstruction of national borders within Scotland.

Published in 2019, *Spring* addresses controversies surrounding Brexit, immigrant detention, and the leadership of Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. Political passages describing real events are interspersed throughout the novel, encouraging a reading of the quartet rooted in the contemporary moment. The insinuation of contemporary politics into the fictional narrative in *Spring* is a pattern originating from *Autumn* and *Winter*. In *Winter*, for example, Smith suddenly abandons the narrative of Art, Lux, Sophia, and Iris to discuss the harassment of a British member of parliament: “In late winter a couple of days after five million people, mostly women, take part in marches all across the world to protest against misogyny in power. A man barks at a woman. I mean barks like a dog. *Woof woof*. This happens in the House of Commons” (*Winter* 89). This passage refers to a 2017 event in which a Tory MP barked at a female colleague who was condemning the racist ideology of Donald Trump. A similar section appears in *Autumn* reacting to the Brexit decision in 2016, although “Brexit” is never explicitly named as the subject: “All across the country, people looked up Google: *what is EU?* All across the country people looked up Google: *move to Scotland*” (*Autumn* 59). Scotland here is tellingly placed on the outskirts of this political chaos, although Smith will go on to implicate Scotland in issues of nationalism later in *Spring*. As is exemplified by the inclusion of these passages, Smith embraces the comparison of these narratives with contemporary politics. Although Smith also roots *Spring* in contemporary issues, she encourages broader comparisons in the novel; the first page of *Spring* opens, “Now what we don’t want is Facts. What we want is bewilderment. What we want is repetition. What we want is repetition. What we want is people in power saying the truth is not the truth” (*Spring* 3). Although this passage is explicitly political and referentially contemporaneous, it is also intentionally general given that the twisting of facts is an issue associated with the history of politics, as much as with the politics of “today.” These short

political passages represent scenes that cross temporal and national borders, finding resonance globally as well as within the UK. The contrast between these passages from *Winter* and *Spring* represents the function of *Spring* in the quartet as both reflecting the present moment while also encouraging a universal perspective on the narrative.

The discussion of national borders in the work of Ali Smith requires an analysis centered within Scotland, specifically with the aim to locate the country in a history of immigration. In *Spring*, the young Florence travels with Brit, a UK detention officer, as she journeys to Scotland to reunite with her mother. Richard Lease, the screenwriter, similarly boards a train to Scotland without a specific destination in mind, eventually crossing paths with Florence and Brit along the way. In this novel, Scotland becomes a meeting place for displaced individuals, offering a refuge for those wishing to leave England. This idea of Scotland as refuge for immigrants is widely embraced in contemporary politics; although Scotland has limited control over the immigration policies of the UK, Scottish Government maintains welcoming attitudes on immigration. Some scholars, however, are calling for further scrutiny of this public impression of Scotland. One recent study, for example, acknowledges that Scottish Government has more progressive platforms than their English counterparts, but observes an increasing hostility towards immigrants among the public in Scotland, citing “nationalist leanings and opposition to ‘Others’” as a source of this hostility. The researchers on this study make a prediction that “a change in the constitutional settlement that gives Scotland greater control over immigration may see policymakers north of the border coming under increased pressure to ‘tone down’ its thus far very positive messages about migration” (McCullom, 22). In *Spring*, Smith focuses in on this tension between outward displays of inclusivity and internal exclusionist attitudes within Scotland. In building the novel around the crossing of the Anglo-Scottish border, Smith presents

an awareness of how the national border in Scotland disguises public sentiment between state politics and the politics of place.

Scotland's function as a neutral territory in *Spring* encourages us to identify who is permitted or rejected by the national border. Specifically, Smith encourages us to consider who can claim Scottishness and who cannot. The tendency towards self-division in Scottish literary history can be identified by returning to Christopher Whyte's "Nationalism and its Discontents." In discussing a 20th century Scottish Gaelic poem by Aonghas Caimbeul, Whyte writes: "the speaker of this poem is defined by his position, conceived in terms of marginality and exile, of shutting out and boxing in" ("Nationalism" 26). Whyte argues that this pattern of "boxing-in" is pervasive in Scottish literature, ultimately restricting the progress of national literature. Despite Scotland's literary and cultural familiarity with marginality, public sentiment does not generally reflect a sense of solidarity with other marginalized identities. Though the Scottish National Party maintains pro-immigration platforms, and the majority of Scotland voted against Brexit in 2016, a large portion of the population still maintains the attitude that there are "too many immigrants" in the country (Fraser). Scotland, despite having more progressive platforms than England, is still invested in the "shutting out and boxing in" of national borders and implicated in the xenophobic ideology of pro-Brexit campaigns. In *Spring*, Smith represents this tension between Scotland's perceived neutrality and its complicity in shutting out immigrants. Brit, Florence, and Richard travel to Scotland with the belief that crossing the border will somehow be enlightening or provide them with solace. In the final scene of *Spring*, however, Florence and her mother are arrested at the site of the Battle of Culloden by Scottish immigration officers working for the same UK detention system as Brit. For most of the novel, Smith intentionally maintains

the illusion that Brit, Florence, and Richard will find refuge and resolution in Scotland, only to reject these notions of Scotland's openness towards immigrants during this final arrest scene.

As previously discussed, the border identity is a pervasive motif across Scottish literary history. Many of the borders dividing Scotland can be attributed to its colonization by England; the religious borders, for example, reflect the consequences of their allegiance to the protestant monarchy, as do the linguistic borders separating Scots and English. Defining Scottishness as a postcolonial identity, however, is a complicated task; as Michael Gardiner writes in his introduction to "Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives," it is helpful to talk about Scotland not solely as being or not being a colony because "on an epistemological level, the Scottish contribution was the essence of the Empire" (Gardiner 3). Here, Gardiner recognizes that Scotland was both colonized by the British Empire and acting on the part of colonizer. This duality isn't isolated to Scotland, however; the participation of the colonized population in the political actions of the empire is a characteristic of many postcolonial states, a complication that can be observed across a spectra of postcolonial literatures (McLennan). In *Spring*, Smith is interested in interrogating this duality by asking questions about the complicity of postcolonial Scotland in upholding the policies of the British empire, particularly those policies surrounding immigration.

The final Jacobite rising of 1745 is an important marker of Scotland's colonial history. The rising, in which the Scottish Jacobites led by Bonnie Prince Charlie made their last push against the British throne, culminated in the Battle of Culloden where the Scots were at last defeated by the British army near Inverness. Following their defeat, Scottish soldiers that had been spared execution or imprisonment were commandeered by the British, often being sent from the country to serve the Empire in the colonies as soldiers and slave traders (Summerwill).

In the years that followed the Battle of Culloden, Highland soldiers made up some of the strongest army regiments of the British, fighting for the Empire against France and helping to drastically increase the size of their navy. Although the Scots experienced a great deal of shame in having to serve the British, Scottish highlanders nevertheless were complicit in the expansion of Britain's colonial power in the decades that followed the rising and often benefited from the established trade networks (MacPherson). Thus Scotland suffered the consequences of British imperialism while simultaneously reaping its rewards, a status that mirrors itself in the contemporary discussions of Scotland's role in the immigration policies of the UK. In the introduction to his book *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination* Silke Stroh asks, "Is Scottish political and cultural nationalism similar to anticolonial resistance overseas? Or are such comparisons no more than Scottish patriotic victimology, attempting to mask complicity in the British Empire and justify initiatives to secede from the United Kingdom?" (Stroh 3). Throughout the seasonal quartet, Smith pursues similar lines of questioning, drawing on histories that place her contemporary narrative in a postcolonial context. This uncertainty about whether or not Scottishness is a displaced culture resonates throughout *Spring*, as Scotland serves as both a meeting place for immigrants and the site of their arrest at the end of the novel.

While acknowledging this ambiguity about Scotland's national formation, Smith also imagines the national border as having metamorphic capabilities. In crossing the border from England into Scotland, Smith presents the national border as a transformative border, instigating the instantaneous change in identity from citizen to immigrant or from belonging to non-belonging. Originating in the medieval era of English literary history, there has been a tendency for England to perceive bordering states as "ethnic antagonists," and for the lands across the national borders to be understood as supernatural, otherworldly spaces (Heng). Smith takes up

this motif in her representation of a magically transformative national border in *Spring*. In the novel, detention officer Brit spontaneously decides to ditch work to accompany Florence on her way to Scotland, not immediately realizing that Florence is hoping to reunite with her mother who is evading detention. On their way north, Florence questions Brit as to what the difference is between Scotland and England, and if she will be able to see the difference from the train. Florence asks, “I didn’t see any border...Did you see it? I don’t see anything different” (*Spring* 195). Interestingly, this observation of the invisibility of the border is a pattern that can be traced across postcolonial texts. In a strikingly similar scene in Amitav Ghosh’s 1988 *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator’s grandmother also poses the question of whether or not she will be able to see the border between East Pakistan and India from her plane window. She wonders, “But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same...” (Ghosh 167). In both of these scenes, the characters grapple with the properties of national borders, not quite understanding how invisible borders induce such tangible consequences for the populations they divide. Through Florence’s line of questioning in *Spring*, Smith seems to participate in a postcolonial tradition interested in the transformative characteristics of the border and their origins.

For Brit, there is an immediate understanding that, although it can’t be seen, the border between England and Scotland is transformative, bringing you from the domain of one nationality to another. Florence, however, doesn’t share this intuitive sense about what borders signify. She is confused by the seemingly magical qualities she recognizes at the border: that despite its invisibility, it is so fundamentally important to self-identity and that to cross the invisible border is to transform oneself from one identity to another. On one side of the border, Florence’s mother is a detained immigrant; on the other side, she is a fugitive. On one side Brit is

a government employee; on the other side she is a tourist. The border is distinctly divisive in the imagination of Brit, but Florence is able to recognize the potential for something different. In a moment of dialogue that sums up one of the central themes of the quartet, Florence asks Brit, “what if...instead of saying this border divides these places. We said, this border unites these places...What if we declared border crossings places where, listen, when you crossed them, you yourself became doubly possible” (*Spring* 196). Florence imagines a national border in which transformative power is not limiting, but full of possibility. This idea strengthens Smith’s vision of borders as permeable, destabilizing Brit’s understanding of borders as delineating immutable identities.

An interesting parallel emerges between Scotland and Switzerland as we move further along the two central narratives of *Spring*. Alongside the narrative of Brit and Florence runs the story of Richard Lease, a man who has recently lost his mentor and friend Paddy Heal. One of the screenplays that Richard has been assigned centers on the supposed meeting between Katherine Mansfield and Rilke in Switzerland in 1922. In a scene set five months before Paddy’s death, Richard and Paddy discuss the ridiculousness of the drafted sex scenes between Mansfield and Rilke and what Richard might do to turn the project around. Paddy finds the overlap of Rilke and Mansfield in the same place and time to be astounding saying, “all this on a plate, and a *gift* of a story. Real people in the same place by chance, and not knowing, not meeting. Passing each other so close. Inches. That’s brilliant in itself” (*Spring* 42). Even though the proposed screenplay is ridiculous given the timeline of Mansfield’s diagnosis with tuberculosis, Paddy sees that there is still something amazing about how the lives of these two strangers were able to brush one another in such a tumultuous time, with the national borders dividing them seemingly nullified on this neutral ground. There is an impression that Switzerland’s neutrality in the inter-

war years invited the meeting between these two literary icons in a time when such a meeting across nationalities had many obstacles. Scotland functions similarly in the lives of Richard, Florence, and Brit in *Spring*. In the chaos of Brexit, particularly in the controversy over new immigration policies that further restrict travel into the UK, Scotland serves as neutral territory for these characters. Although Smith doesn't shy away from implicating Scotland in the xenophobic policies of Brexit, as is demonstrated in the final scene of *Spring*, Smith still portrays Scotland as a place where many different lives seem to become entangled.

In the last scene in *Spring*, a network named the Auld Alliance, which aids individuals trying to escape the UK detention system, helps unite Florence and her mother at the site of the Battle of Culloden in Scotland. This is a thematically significant setting as it marks the location of the last battle between England and Scotland during the Jacobite rising of 1745 which marked the end of the Stuart challenge to the throne of Great Britain. Another contemporary battle is fought on the same site in *Spring*, this time deciding whether Scotland's more externally progressive views or England's conservative attitude on immigration will prevail. At Culloden, Florence and her mother have only a few seconds to themselves before immigration officers and tourists collide on the scene: "a few more people round the car park, including some actors who've come out of the visitor center dressed up as people from the past, a bit like ghosts, ghosts from both sides of the battle, watch them being loaded into the vans" (*Spring* 333). We learn that Brit, despite her growing endearment towards Florence, has decided to call the immigration hotline to report Florence's mother. Once again, England, or at least England's policies on immigration, have won the battle at Culloden, leading to the separation of Florence from her mother and their ultimate return to the UK detention system. In this final scene, Smith portrays this battlefield as a setting where the ghosts of the Battle of Culloden, the actors that roleplay

them, and the UK detention officers coming to separate Florence from her mother can, for a moment, all magically exist in the same time and place. Their moment of reunion draws these figures together: “a child runs across the grass over the bones of the dead and leaps into the arms of a young woman...They stand there like that and it’s like the world can’t not coalesce around it” (*Spring* 332). Despite the temporal and national barriers that would normally prevent a meeting between the two sides of a battle or between people from across the world, crossing the Scottish border diminishes these barriers. Crossing the border into Scotland, just like crossing the border into Switzerland, somehow invites these unlikely meetups and draws attention to how often our lives brush up against one another. The arrest unfolds at a site where Scottish history is commodified as a tourist attraction, just as the lives of Florence and her mother are commodified by the UK detention system. Scotland, however, is not excluded from the horrors of their separation. As part of the UK, Scotland too is involved in this armed response to Florence’s reunion with her mother. Despite the public impression of Scotland as location that welcomes the cross-cultural meetups, however, Smith still implicates Scotland in British immigration policies that allowed for the separation of Florence from her mother.

Although Florence is ultimately unable to stop Brit’s participation in a violent detention system, she does a lot of work in *Spring* to interrogate Brit’s understanding of national borders. In the work of Ali Smith, children like Florence act as destabilizing forces that can permeate borders. In a 2012 interview with Gillian Beer, Smith comments on the presence of children in her novels:

I know that I think that that child state is a state of moral understanding, where you really are discriminating the rights and the wrongs...because as information comes to you, you

siphon it so much more clearly than we do when we come to the teenage point where things begin to codify, and then into adulthood, where things begin to narrativize. Where adults really do, we do tell ourselves those fixed stories about ourselves because it's the only way that we can stay safe with the sense of identity. So we do tend to go, 'Well, this is the person that I am, and this is what made me the person that I am' (Beer 152-153).

In this interview, Smith identifies the figure of the child as someone who sees "so much more clearly than we do." This passage relates directly back to the conversation Brit and Florence share about the Scottish border in *Spring*; as an adult, Brit has begun to "narrativize" the border between these two countries, reading the identity markers hidden under the national border and relating them to the broader national story about who belongs on which side. Florence, on the other hand, has yet to "codify" things in this way; she sees no physical difference at the border between England and Scotland and no true difference between the populations divided by it. The character of Florence is rooted in a strong tradition of border-crossing children in Scottish literary history. Most notably, Florence shares many qualities with J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan. Peter, existing "betwixt and between" being forever a child and never an adult, hasn't yet fortified the borders between dream and reality in his imagination. He can flit between Neverland and London because he believes in the permeability in these borders, as Florence does in *Spring*. Florence can similarly traverse borders, jumping turnstiles and boarding trains without tickets, serving as a vehicle for border-destabilizing forces.

Florence's recognition of the narrativization surrounding the national border is illustrated in many scenes throughout *Spring*. When Brit first sees Florence at the train station and decides to accompany her on the way to Scotland, Brit wonders whether or not this is the same girl who

managed to break into the detention center a few days prior to speak with the manager. In an earlier scene a coworker describes to Brit that Florence had made it past the barriers of the detention center and “stood there telling the guys on the gate to sort it out that night, get the DCO’s to unlock her mother’s room...CCTV playback from opposite the front gates shows some woman in the middle of the night just walking out...” (*Spring* 138-137). Florence easily traverses the barriers separating detained immigrants from the outside world. She is allowed to board a train without a ticket and able to secure the help of a detention officer in traveling to meet her undocumented mother. Florence’s ability to see the permeability of barriers allows her to break them more efficiently.

Florence’s barrier-breaking is reminiscent of the abilities of the surreal figure identified in *Winter*. Like Lux in *Winter* and Amber in *The Accidental*, Florence is able to break boundaries between people with the same ease as with tangible physical boundaries. Florence breaks into the detention centre, but more importantly she gets the detention officers to release detainees. Brit’s coworker tells another story about Florence supposedly walking into a sex trafficker’s house and “in the space of half an hour [going] through several rooms persuading clients out of what they were in the middle of doing” (*Spring* 137). “Even in a school uniform?” Brit asks in response, unable to imagine a young girl freeing these victims more efficiently than the police. Florence has many of the mythical qualities of the surreal figure in her uncanny ability to get at the heart of people, sharing with them the clarity through which she sees the world. Although we do not witness the actual dialogue between Florence and these “clients,” we can imagine how targeted and persuasive they were based on her conversation with the manager at the detention center. Florence easily picks apart the manager by asking pointed questions like, “is migrating to another country because you need help actually a crime?” (*Spring* 205). She simultaneously

identifies the divisions we have constructed between ourselves and finds ways to poke holes in those divisions. Florence refuses to accept that the simple act of crossing a government-ordained border fundamentally transforms someone's identity. In presenting this question, Florence asks both the manager and the reader why permeating national borders seems so radically dangerous.

The figure of the boundary-breaking child appears in many of Smith's novels. Published in 2011, *There but for the* shares many similarities with *Spring*, including the thematic importance of children. The novel is structured into four sections by the four words in its title, and centers on the story of Miles Garth, a man who attends a dinner party at a stranger's house only to subsequently refuse to leave. Miles becomes an intruder in the Lee household, living off food pushed under the bedroom door and refusing to come out, even as a crowd of spectators gathers outside to watch for signs of his movement. Brooke, a young girl strikingly like Florence in *Spring*, is the only person able to contact him at all. On her way to deliver a note to Miles Brooke finds: "It's not locked!...It hasn't been locked for months, not since summer, Mr. Garth said, but nobody's knocked on it till now" (*There but* 337). Brooke, like Florence, simply asks the obvious question of whether the boundary between her and Miles is even there at all. Brooke's refusal to "narrativize" the doorway as an impassable border allows her to communicate with Miles and better understand why he has isolated himself.

In *There but for the*, the dinner guests debate immigration, making comments such as "everywhere needs some defence against people just coming in and overrunning the place with their terrorisms or their deficiencies" and ironically "got to keep all those bad refugees out. The ones looking for a better life" (*There but* 146). These references encourage our reading of Miles' intrusion as reflecting national attitudes on immigration. As Ulrike Tancke writes in her essay, "Narrating Intrusion: Deceptive Storytelling and Frustrated Desires in *The Accidental* and *There*

but for the,” the dialogue on immigration in this novel asks the reader to “admit his or her own investment in similar scenarios of division. In so doing, the narrative expresses a hard-to-admit constant of human living-together, namely that a borderless world is a utopian vision” (Tancke 87). The figure of the child in *Spring* and *There but for the* prompts our questioning of the divisions we construct between ourselves and our imagining of how these divisions can change.

There but for the may also be important to discussing how Smith partakes in a global vision. As observed throughout *Autumn*, *Winter* and *Spring*, Smith is interested in recognizing the permeability of national borders. Although this permeability is fundamental to Smith’s vision of national borders, she still recognizes the essentiality of the border in constructing our identities. In this way, Smith’s vision for globalization is distinct from the “borderless utopian world” that Tancke nods to in her analysis of the novel. Miles in *There but for the* may serve as a good representative of Smith’s global perspective. In Joel Evan’s essay “Ali Smith’s Necessary-Contingent, or Navigating the Global,” Evans identifies the character of Miles as exhibiting a unique balance between “anti-nomadism” and globality. Miles is constrained to the room he inhabits in the Lee’s house, yet he garners global attention as his story resonates internationally, spurring a group of tourists to set up camp outside the home to monitor his movements. Evan identifies Miles as representing a certain “global citizenship,” illustrating how “from a single, individual point, the entire population of the cosmos is linked together” (Evans 645). This relates to the themes of interconnectedness associated with the Global Hotel in *Hotel World*. From the fixed geographic location of the hotel, Smith reaches out with the camera-eye perspective to participate in a global worldview. Smith is not interested in discussing globalization exclusively through the lenses of politics and economics. When a dinner guest in *There But for the* claims that the “global business market” reflects our existence in “more or less a borderless world,”

Brooke scoffs at him, explaining how borders restrict the movement of many people from a certain class or of a particular immigrant status (*There but* 146). In her references towards globalization in this novel, Smith reveals her interest in maintaining a global perspective while simultaneously upholding the importance of borders in structuring this perspective.

Spring encourages our reflection on how nationality both defines and restricts our sense of identity. In building off the themes of interconnectivity discussed in *Winter*, *Spring* asks us to look closely at the topic of immigration to consider questions such as how we've imagined borders as transformative and why recognizing the national border as permeable is frightening to us. Across the quartet, Smith showcases how strongly our identities are tied to these national borders. As is illustrated in *Spring* through the character of Brit, when we imagine that the national borders are threatened, perhaps by the crossing of people of another nationality, we cling more desperately to the borders we have constructed in an attempt to preserve the foundations of our identity. Florence encourages Brit, and indirectly the reader, to consider this permeability not as a bad or dangerous thing, but as something that will ultimately strengthen our sense of global identity. In returning to Florence's conversation with Brit about the purpose of passports we see Florence say, "But listen. Just say. Say. Instead of having to prove who you are with a paper or a booklet...Instead you could prove who you are by what you *see* with your eyes and by what you *make* with your hands..." (*Spring* 196). In this passage, Florence proposes that we define ourselves not by our national identity but by who we are as human beings. She believes that our sense of self will actually be expanded if we release our hold on the national border, and allow ourselves to be defined by the qualities we might share with people outside our own countries. This ideology can be applied to the UK and Scotland, but also more globally to any country attempting to delineate who belongs and who does not. Florence's belief in a global

community is at the very heart of the seasonal quartet, and will apply to other identity borders in the last installment of the quartet, *Summer*.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMER

“Everything can be more than itself. Everything IS more than itself” (*Artful* 93).

In *Summer*, published in July of 2020, Smith draws us into a world descending into chaos; the coronavirus pandemic has spread across the globe, governments everywhere are shutting down, and the climate crisis is “cladding the world like a tea cosy” (*Summer* 93). *Summer* manages to balance this universal tumult with the lives of the Greenlaws, a family undergoing their own domestic turmoil on a slightly more personal scale. Grace and her adolescent children Sacha and Robert butt heads as they each struggle to respond to the upending world around them. The contemporary issues introduced in *Summer*, however, are by no means the only source of chaos in the novel. As the last novel in the seasonal quartet, *Summer* brings together characters and stories from across the quartet; Daniel and Elisabeth from *Autumn* as well as Art and Charlotte from *Winter* appear in *Summer* at various points to interact with the Greenlaws, making *Summer* the site of each season’s inevitable collapse onto one another.

In addition to the reappearance of characters from throughout the quartet, Smith depicts the reincarnation of characters across time and place, breaking through many identity borders in their path. It is through this reincarnation in *Summer* that Ali Smith destabilizes gender borders through the fluid movement of her characters across the gender spectrum. Up until *Summer*, each novel of the seasonal quartet remains self-contained, but in this last installment, the plots, characters, and timelines of all four become merged. Through this novel, I identify how Smith’s interrogation of gender borders supports her broader thematic endeavors surrounding permeability and inclusivity. Introducing gender into MacDiarmid’s conceptualization of the

border identity results in the disintegration of his fixed formulations, and as such gender serves as the crowning border in Ali Smith's quartet, necessitating the reformation of temporal, formal, and national borders as well. I use the chaotic world presented in *Summer* to help showcase the many webs of connection uniting the four seasonal novels, revealing the destabilization underpinning the quartet as a whole.

Girl meets boy represents Smith's most monumental work on the subject of gender. Published in 2007, the novel is a modern-day retelling of the myth of Iphis, a story in which Iphis, born into a female body but raised male, falls in love with a woman named Ianthe, prompting the gods to transform Iphis into a male form to allow for their marriage. In *Girl meets boy*, the character of Robin serves as Smith's contemporary Iphis, with a few essential differences. Anthea, Smith's protagonist and modern-day Ianthe, is entranced by Robin's position on both ends of the gender spectrum and neither at the same time:

It had been exciting, first the not knowing what Robin was, then the finding out. The grey area, I'd discovered, had been misnamed: really the grey area was a whole spectrum of colors new to the eye. She had the swagger of a girl. She blushed like a boy. She had a girl's toughness (*Girl meets* 84).

This passage highlights one of the main departures Smith takes from the traditional myth of Iphis. Robin, unlike Iphis, is not a girl permanently transformed into a boy, but a person existing in a state of complete fluidity: a "grey area" that isn't grey at all, but full of freedom and possibility. The thematic significance of this colorful "grey area" in *Girl meets boy* relates to the

earlier discussion of the traditional Scottish border identity and its perceived restrictions.

According to MacDiarmid, for example, the grey area is a consistent site of tension for Scottish identity. MacDiarmid's definition of Caledonian antiszygy reflects a failure to belong on one end of a variety of identity binaries, and a general sense of confusion in belonging to this grey area. Through authors such as MacDiarmid, Stevenson, and Barrie, we observe how the grey area has been paradoxically fixed in Scottish literary history, and how many of their characters become frustratingly stuck between competing identities. Contemporary Scottish authors like Smith, however, are reimagining the grey area as overcoming these fixed associations. Critic Fiona McCulloch, in writing on contemporary Scottish novelist Zoë Strachan, argues that in "surmount[ing] the claustrophobic locatives of gender, sexuality, and national identity imposed by Caledonian patriarchy" Strachan is able to imagine a space that overcomes identity binaries "in favour of a supranational citizenship that journeys outwards in the search for new horizons" (McCulloch 2). In *Girl meets boy*, Smith transcends the restrictions of Caledonian antiszygy by embracing the same techniques as Strachan. Robin has the "swagger of a girl:" a description that both places Robin within the gender binary while simultaneously distancing Robin from conventional gender markers in the observation of "swagger" as being girlish. In transforming the grey area as it has come to be represented within traditions of Caledonian antiszygy, Smith explores new possibilities for defining Scottish identity.

In her genderqueer portrait of Robin, Smith transcends traditions of Caledonian antiszygy to embrace the grey area as a place of exciting possibility. As Kaye Mitchell identifies in her essay, "Queer Metamorphoses: *Girl meets boy* and the Futures of Queer Fiction," Smith represents gender as far less binaristic than in the original myth. Mitchell writes,

“Smith presents gender as much more radically indeterminate...Robin and Anthea are ‘both genders, a whole new gender, no gender at all,’ and the imagery here darts peripatetically between the conventionally masculine/phallic and the conventionally feminine” (Mitchell 68). Anthea’s reversal of gender stereotypes in her observation of Robin as having a “boy’s blush” or a “girl’s toughness” plays into this radical indeterminism. Not only does Robin refuse to exist at either end of a binary, but the binary itself disintegrates in this passage as Anthea inverts the very qualities that define it. Genderqueerness in *Girl meets boy* represents the ability not just to cross over borders but move effortlessly and fluidly through them. This fluidity radiates through every other border identified in Smith’s work in that temporality, form and national divisions are also called into question by this gendering of the Caledonian border identity.

In Smith’s 2014 novel *How to Be Both*, genderqueerness encourages the traversing of many other literary and identity borders. The two central figures in *How to Be Both*, Francesco del Cossa and George, defy the gender binary in differing ways. Francesco is a transgender man who must uphold an outer facade of masculinity to be accepted into his trade as a Renaissance artist. The gender identity of George, on the other hand, is left unclarified for much of the novel until we learn that Francesco has been misidentifying George as a boy because of her androgynous appearance. Early on in the novel, it is established that Francesco’s gender identity allows him access to social spaces that would otherwise be restricted to him. The best example of this is in Francesco’s patronage at a brothel in Ferrara where, because of his artistry and transgender identity, he is trusted among the brothel’s women. When the mistress of the brothel confronts Francesco for encouraging her women to “chase a different life,” she asks Francesco to draw a portrait of her as a payment: “So I did her picture...and the next time I came to the house

she took me aside and gave me a front door key she'd had her locksmith make for me" (*How to Be* 101). Francesco's transgender identity first gains him the trust of these women, and his artistry grants him the key into these restricted spaces, granting him the permission to draw their portraits and giving him physical access to their house. His ability to exist across a range of traditionally gendered spaces translates to a broader ability to cross other types of borders. When George views Francesco's painting in a museum in the present day, Francesco is dragged across barriers of time and space as his ghostly presence becomes tied to George. Francesco is able to speak from a narrative position that straddles the 15th century with the present and both masculine and feminine spaces. Once Francesco has transgressed the borders of the gender binary, as he does in his very identification as transgender, other borders become increasingly permeable.

The ending of *Girl meets boy* celebrates the entanglement of multiple borders. As Robin and Anthea get married, temporal, formal, national, and gender borders alike are dissolved in a magical wedding scene encapsulating the permeability of Smith's borders. Anthea describes how she and Robin began a private ceremony outside the cathedral when suddenly a fantastical lineup of guests arrive including, "Venus, Artemis, and Dionysos," "the Lochness monster," and "a telegram from John Knox" (*Girl meets* 153-154). The diversity of this lineup, ranging from the real to the surreal and from the historic to the mythic, highlight how the crossing of gender borders in Anthea and Robin's genderqueer marriage celebration allows these figures to appear across national and temporal divisions. Even John Knox, an ardent voice against the reign of "monstrous women" during the era of Mary Queen of Scots, is drawn into this collapse of gender borders, functioning similarly to how witnesses coalesce around the reunion of Florence and her

mother in *Spring*. Unlike the chaos introduced at the beginning of *Summer*, the chaos at the end of *Girl meets boy* is joyous, again showing Smith's celebration of the grey area. Just as Francesco's genderqueer identity in *How to Be Both* allows his temporal traversing into present day England, so does Robin and Anthea's ability to be "both genders, a whole new gender, no gender at all" open the door for figures to mobilize towards the source of the border-breaking.

Mitchell praises Smith's reinvention of a story that "predates the conception of sexuality," reflecting Smith's understanding of the "desire for identities and a strategic need for them; this desire for both continuity and change, belonging and transcendence, that metamorphosis facilitates" (Mitchell 62). In her essay, Mitchell argues that the hard borders between identities can be discarded without negating the importance of identity. Robin, for example, navigates fluidly through gender borders while still representing a "longing for some kind of continuity, sameness and belonging that we might call 'identity'" (Mitchell 66). Here, Mitchell pinpoints a balance between the essentiality and dispensability of gender borders in the work of Ali Smith. Borders can shape our sense of selves and allow us to form communities, but they can simultaneously limit these efforts when not allowed some flexibility. *Girl meets boy* relies on borders, but distances itself from the traditional Caledonian interpretation of them. This illustration of borders as both essential and requiring permeability extends beyond *Girl meets boy* to each novel in the seasonal quartet

In *Summer*, the reincarnation of past characters into the present narrative becomes another way in which Smith upends gender borders, illustrating her idea that an individual soul is not bound by gender. This is best exemplified through the relationship of Daniel Gluck and his younger sister Hannah from *Autumn*. In the first novel of the quartet, Daniel is constantly awed

by Hannah's brilliance and struggles to keep up with her quick thinking. Defying her earlier pattern of having each novel stand alone, with each cast of characters contained within their seasonal novel, Smith draws Daniel and Hannah into the story of Charlotte, Art, and the Greenlaws in *Summer*. In one of the opening scenes of the novel, the Greenlaws spontaneously decide to travel to Suffolk together to join Art and Charlotte on their mission to return the second half of the Barbara Hepworth sculpture to its original owner, Daniel Gluck. Through this series of connections, Robert Greenlaw finds his way into the bedroom of the 101-year-old Daniel and starts a conversation with him. As Robert walks into the room Daniel thinks to himself, "it's Hannah, God help him, there in the room, aged twelve, in the shape of a boy" (*Summer* 195). After Robert (now Hannah) rattles off a monologue on existentialism and Einstein, Daniel reassures himself again:

There is no doubt, Daniel says. You really are you.

Yes, Hannah says. I really am me. And you really are you. But if we follow Einstein's thinking and add together you plus me plus time plus space. What does that all make?

Then she waits, like she always did, for Daniel finally to catch her up.

What? What does it all make? Daniel says.

It makes you and I more than just you or I, Hannah says. It makes us us. (*Summer* 197).

Daniel doesn't simply mistake Robert for his younger sister in this passage; he recognizes that the figure before him is "in the shape of a boy," but knows that this person is still somehow Hannah. Indeed, Robert's monologue to Daniel in this scene closely mirrors the sort of

conversations that Daniel and Hannah share in *Autumn* and *Summer*, encouraging the reader to share in Daniel's belief that Hannah has really be reincarnated in his bedroom. Following Hannah/Robert's logic in this passage, Hannah's transformation into Robert, or conversely Robert's transformation into Hannah, is a metamorphosis that crosses both time and space. Adding space and time into Hannah/Robert's perception of herself "makes you and I more than just you or I." Smith presents these reincarnated souls as existing independently of gender. Gender does not define Hannah Gluck's identity, allowing Daniel to recognize her independently from her a feminine form. Through Daniel's recognition that Hannah can appear to him across the bounds of gender, time, and place, Smith again illustrates the permeability of borders in her literary universe. The movement of these characters across novels, geographies, and binaristic gender borders produces both a sense of chaos, as illustrated in *Girl meets boy*, but also a sense of clarity in how all these characters are related to each other. Hannah's reincarnation into Robert encourages us to note similarities between characters across the quartet, regardless of differences in gender or age, and to observe the ways these characters are unified despite the borders separating them.

Robert Greenlaw is not the only character in *Summer* who can transform in this way. His sister Sacha also draws comparisons with another character from the quartet, this time a character from *Winter*, Aunt Iris. Sacha very much embodies the figure of the activist; she refuses to ride in the car because of its gas emissions, educates her family's visitors about Greta Thunberg, and ardently fights with her mother about how her generation worries about things like trustworthy sources as "a displacement activity from worrying about real things happening in the world" (*Summer* 11). After hearing Sacha speak against her mother's racist rhetoric

surrounding Brexit and COVID-19, Art interrupts to observe, “you very much remind me of my Aunt Iris” (Summer 94). A few moments later Art reaffirms this thought saying, “she’s even more like Iris than I thought.” This pattern is reminiscent of the way that Daniel asserts that “there is no doubt” Hannah has appeared in his bedroom. The more we hear from Sacha, the more we realize that she isn’t just similar to Aunt Iris — she mirrors her exactly; it’s difficult to identify characteristics in which Sacha and Aunt Iris truly differ from one another. Unlike Hannah Gluck, Aunt Iris is still living at the same time as her young counterpart, but the same patterns of character reincarnation apply. These reincarnated qualities extend beyond Robert and Sacha. In *Summer*, for example, Art and Charlotte begin to display some of the qualities of Lux, one of Smith’s surreal figures from *Winter*, when they form an impermanent community with the Greenlaw family. Their interaction with the Greenlaws is fleeting, but the consequences of their meeting on each individual member of the family is great, mirroring the surreal qualities of Lux and Amber from *The Accidental*. In *Summer*, Smith delights in creating these circles of connection, drawing characters forward in order to construct a continuity back into *Autumn*. There is an intentional lack of clarity in how exactly these characters overlap and whether or not they have truly been reincarnated. Smith explores the possibility of connection across the formal borders containing these characters. Although the reincarnation of characters is a motif isolated to *Summer*, characters originating from across *Autumn*, *Winter*, and *Spring* help to close the quartet in on itself, creating not a series of novels but a circle.

As showcased in *Summer*, Smith’s reincarnated characters form internal connections within the quartet, playing into Smith’s larger patterns of self-referentiality. Although Smith references many works outside of her quartet, notably from Shakespeare, Keats, Woolf, and

Dickens, she relies equally on references leading back to her own work. In *Summer*, for example, we learn that Elisabeth is reading the Rilke and Mansfield crossover novel introduced in *Spring*.

We also learn that Sacha Greenlaw has been writing letters to a detained immigrant named Hero, a minor character from *Spring* being held in the same detention centre where Brit works.

Although *Summer* can be read as an independent novel, the audience may only fully appreciate Smith's references and larger themes of interconnectivity by having read the prior installments in the quartet. This structuring reflects Smith's broader investment in her reader's anticipations; *Autumn*, *Winter*, and *Spring* give an impression of self-containment, and only in *Summer* is the full extent of the quartet's connections revealed. The seasonal structure of the quartet works in parallel with this self-referentiality to reveal the webs crossing time, gender, genre, and place in the work of Ali Smith.

In a conversation she shares with Art and Charlotte, Grace Greenlaw expresses her love of summer saying, "Cornfields high. The cornheads swinging like their own golden wave of the sea...I felt immortal that summer...How stupid we were. But what summers. They were wonderful. The smell of cut grass" (*Summer* 100). As Grace professes this nostalgia, Robert thinks to himself, "summer can fuck off...it's too hot to do anything, and the leaves hang off the trees going a duller filthier colour by the week and everywhere smells of shit and sick, all the litter bins smell of off milk, the whole season is like the smell round a rubbish truck" (*Summer* 100). One of the fundamental themes of *Summer* is to show that neither of these imaginings is the right or wrong portrait of summer. *Summer* balances between the lovely and disgusting, the global and the personal, just as all of Smith's novels balance between the bleak and the beautiful in life. *Summer* embraces the chaos of all of these characteristics at once, refusing to contain

itself to one definitive image of what we expect summer to be. This refusal of containment is a defining characteristic of Smith's work and is an important ending point to the seasonal quartet.

In returning to Christopher Whyte's introduction to *Gendering the Nation*, we can observe how the gendering of antiszygy in the work of Ali Smith necessitates the reformation of national identity. Whyte writes on the subject of MacDiarmid's 1926 poem: "if the Drunk Man succeeds in standing for his nation, his representation is limited to its male members, and the heterosexual ones at that" ("Gendering" 2). MacDiarmid's portrait of the Drunk Man is a quintessential embodiment of Caledonian antiszygy, but as Whyte points out, the Drunk Man as MacDiarmid imagines him doesn't accurately reflect the country in its exclusion of women and queer identities. With the inclusion of these queer identities, the formulation of Caledonian antiszygy as a fixed national identity crumbles, along with other borders maintained by the "Caledonian patriarchy." In gendering the Scottish border identity, as Whyte proposes in his introduction, Smith transforms constructions of Scottish identity that rely on the binary, embracing the "grey area" or the place "whaur extremes meet" as a territory defined by mobility and fluidity. Genderqueer identities, in many ways representing the ultimate form of border identities, necessitate the metamorphization of antiszygy as it has been traditionally interpreted simply because the concept antiszygy had never incorporated them before. The very inclusion of these identities challenges conventional gender borders and requires a reevaluation of the foundations of neighboring borders.

Through my discussion of each novel in seasonal quartet, I have addressed how temporal, formal, national, and gender borders are defined, interrogated, and ultimately destabilized in the work of Ali Smith. Although these borders may be important in shaping identities and

communities, their permeability is necessary to achieve a less restricted sense of self. In addressing these four borders, I have identified how they are each interrelated and how these borders respond to the traversing of another border. Smith's general perspective on the purpose of borders in her work is reflected in one of the closing passages in *Girl meets boy*. In one of the last sections of the novel called "us" Anthea reflects:

I wondered why on earth would anyone ever stand in the world as if standing in the cornucopic middle of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon but inside a tiny white-painted rectangle about the size of a single space in a car park, refusing to come out of it, and all round her or him the whole world, beautiful, various, waiting? (*Girl meets* 105).

Anthea in this passage provides a framework for how Smith views borders in her own writing. She questions why people would want to contain themselves with self-imposed barriers when they could have access to a broader and more beautiful world around them. Through the themes of temporal and geographic interconnectivity discussed through each novel of the quartet, Smith reveals her vision for a world with fewer impenetrable borders. Although she doesn't partake in a utopian vision of complete borderlessness, she still encourages the reevaluation of the rigidity with which national and gender borders are upheld. Smith shares the viewpoint of young Florence in *Spring*: that borders shouldn't hide us from each other but remind us of our similarities. In redefining the border in this way, Smith aims to broaden our individual positions in the world, challenging us to locate connections with those on the other side. The characters in Smith's universe that are able to cross borders, including the figure of the child and the surreal

figure, see the permeability of borders more clearly than others and begin to stitch these temporary communities together. In placing the border at the center of her work, Smith straddles the contemporary and the historical in order to shape a vision of the future less concerned with the exclusion of particular identities.

EPILOGUE

In *Spring*, Brit and Florence debate their opposing views on immigration during their train ride to Scotland, sharing a moment of dialogue that highlights the contrast in their thinking:

We'll see about that, Brit says.

We'll see, we'll see, with any luck like dragonflies from all the angles, the girl says.

We'll begin again. We'll revolve.

You mean we'll evolve, Brit says.

No, I mean revolve, the girl says, As in revolution. We'll roll forward into a new place.

You mean revolt, Brit says. You're talking about revolting.

I mean revolve, the girl says.

No you don't, Brit says.

I do. We'll turn it round, the girl says, We'll do it all differently (*Spring* 198).

The distinction that Florence makes between evolve and revolve is fundamental to Smith's use of the seasons in structuring the quartet. As shown through each novel of the quartet, the seasons act as "paint-peeling wooden horses on an old carousel," coming around year after year without ever really being new again (*Artful* 5). In this passage from *Spring*, Florence suggests that the debate surrounding immigration isn't a new issue, but rather an issue we revolve around to again and again, always fooling ourselves into thinking the same thing hasn't happened before. This logic extends to several of the contemporary issues that Smith alludes to throughout her seasonal quartet. In *Spring*, Smith establishes the parallel between the Battle of Culloden and the contemporary arrest of Florence and her mother, both occurring at the same site nearly 300 years

apart. In *Autumn*, we are similarly encouraged to draw connections between the rhetoric surrounding Brexit and that of Nazi Germany. Smith wants us to ask if we aren't fighting the same battles over and over again, reaching violent means to determine who belongs on a given side of the border or who gets to draw the borders in the first place. The opening of the quartet introduces us to this idea, as the first line of *Autumn* reads: "it was the worst of times, it was the worst of times. Again. That's the thing about things. They fall apart, always have, always will, it's in their nature" (*Autumn* 3). Here, Smith asserts that it is the nature of time for things to repeat themselves: that the "bad times" we are in now are really just our own histories reshaped. Throughout the seasonal quartet, Smith seems to answer her own question presented earlier in *Artful*: "I'd wondered if the seasons would ever be new again, brand-new time" (*Artful* 5). Florence appears to respond to Smith's question in this moment of dialogue with Brit in *Spring*. "Brand-new time" has never really existed; we have seen it all before, albeit in a different time and different place, and all we are really doing is "rolling forward" over our own pasts. This theme of "revolution" rather than "evolution" forces us to reckon with how we are and how we are not truly changing as a society, independent of the passage of time.

Although Smith recognizes our tendency to revolve rather than evolve, she still argues for a number of ways we can truly metamorphosize, refusing to circle around the same issues year after year. One of the things that Smith urges us to reconsider is our establishment of identity borders. As Smith illustrates in her construction of these parallel histories, our need to establish an in-group and out-group on either side of the border has remained mostly intact throughout our history. "GO HOME," Elisabeth reads off a piece of graffiti in *Autumn*, witnessing the vandalization of her neighbor's front door following the Brexit vote. This message finds foothold outside the contemporary narrative of *Autumn*, resonating equally within the passages about

Hannah Gluck in Nazi-occupied Paris. Although our need for fixity remains constant, to always have a clear idea of who is at “home” and who is without, the identities which we’ve delineated as belonging or not belonging are constantly shifting. This is exemplified by Scotland’s own colonial history, shifting over the course of a few decades from being the main antagonists to the throne of Great Britain to being integral to their continued power. Through the seasonal quartet, Smith proposes a new model with which we construct identity borders. Rather than going through the process of redefining the “in-group” to match contemporary political and social attitudes, Smith wonders if we might not recognize identity borders as having an inherent pliancy, allowing individuals to traverse effortlessly across these border lines. Kaye Mitchell writes in her essay “Queer Metamorphoses” that, “no conception of identity is possible without a conception of metamorphosis” (Mitchell 66). If we recognize the purpose of the border not as exclusionary but as unifying, as allowing individuals to define their place in the world, we can discard the violent traditions associated with our rigid control of the border.

The four novels of the seasonal quartet were published annually beginning in 2016, ending with the release of *Summer* in 2020. Given the rapid turnaround of each novel, often with only a few weeks spanning the completion of Smith’s draft and the release of the novel, the seasonal quartet may serve as a reflection of the contemporary moment more so than novels produced on a more extended timeline. Smith’s *Autumn* serves as an immediate reaction to the Brexit vote, while *Summer* is one of the first novels that addresses the COVID-19 pandemic. Smith encourages us to read these novels in the context of the contemporary moment, reflecting on the politics of figures like Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. Although these novels are certainly representative of contemporary attitudes relating to gender and nationality, Smith’s work refuses to remain contained to the present moment. Just as Smith aims to free each novel

by and outside the confines of its season and orchestrate a collapse of past and present, so has Smith constructed the quartet with the intention that it will illustrate of how our histories haunt us, shaping our present identities as equally as the contemporary moment. Her work offers hope that if we have a better understanding of our past “revolutions” around issues related to gender and nationality, we will be better prepared to “do it all differently” in the future.

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