Unwriting Brexit? Bridging Fictions and Liminal Aesthetics Within the UK's Hostile Environment

Laura A. Zander[1]

Abstract

The article considers the various frictions and fissures in contemporary European politics. Contrary to its historical genesis, this politics often aims at division rather than community, a development epitomized by Brexit. The creation, reinforcement, and protection of borders seem to be a core aim of this policy, which can be observed in EU foreign policy in the narrower sense, but also in the central framing narratives that the EU pursues in the context of border politics and migration in order to fortify the 'fortress Europe', as does the UK with its Hostile Environment policy. Contrary to the supposed populist success of such policies, which were clearly demonstrated by the Brexit referendum vote, there is also widespread skepticism towards such disintegrating governance.

A vast body of literature, mostly so-called Brexlit, addresses the fractures created by Brexit but also the many pre-existing divisions that Brexit did not cause, but was a consequence of. Some of these works establish an antagonistic Leave or Remain dichotomy, perfectly understandable from the point of view of the losing side of the referendum, but perhaps not necessarily productive in terms of reducing the divisions in society or even generating compassion for the opposition. The article argues that there is, however, a body of literature that aims at the erasure of borders, that seeks to bridge the existing ruptures within society and to reconcile the divided camps. I would like to focus on two respective literary projects, the EFACIS Kaleidoscope series which features various writers and artists from Ireland and their respective views on Europe, and Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet and *Companion Piece*, five novels that negotiate contemporary UK politics post Brexit. While both projects perceptibly address contemporary borders and exclusions, they do not present them as inevitable. Rather, they offer alternative designs for overcoming the existing divisions by integrating them into their plots, but they also reflect this communal unity on the formal level of their works. In this respect, both projects seem particularly suited to create a welcoming climate of solidarity, in order to unwrite, if not Brexit itself, at least some of its consequences.

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

The Dream of Europe's Union

Historically, the EU can be understood as a project that has countered a destroyed, deeply fractured, and adversarial Europe with a narrative of common purpose, community, and an understanding of a shared collective future. Whether one takes the Treaty of Brussels (1948), the Treaty of Paris (1951), the Treaty of Rome (1958) or the Treaty of Maastricht (1993) as its defining foundational moment, this supranational political and economic union has successfully prevented conflict amongst and facilitated approximation between its member states in almost every area of life, be it political, cultural, linguistic, or economic community. This renders the European project

> the greatest experiment in political cooperation in human history', that for 'all of its utopian trappings', is founded on the 'negative lessons' and destructive nationalisms of violent European aggression that defined early twentieth-century international relations.[1]

This Union, however, has certainly not erased all borders, but the European continent remains within and without the bounds of the EU very perceptibly defined by its borders. What is sometimes denounced as 'Fortress Europe' is undergirded by an intricate system of border security; and in a sense consciously self-identifies by its demarcation from the outside, its exclusion of those who are deemed not to belong. The effort to deter migrants is a central element of EU policy. A fact all too evident in numbers, as the billions of euros so far devoted to the deterrence of migrants, whether on surveillance, border patrol, or more than one thousand kilometers of walls, make evident. The dismantling of border enforcement within the Schengen Zone came at the price of reinforcing external borders. EU border policies operate on various levels, all of which intend to prevent, deter, intercept, and return migrants and refugees from within European borders.

   Whereas borders were always an essential part of the EU, the 2016 referendum and the subsequent Brexit years mark an era uniquely preoccupied with ruptures, borders, and divisions. A wide range of fictional pieces bears witness to what Heidemann has termed 'The Brexit Within' ranging from Zadie Smith's 'Fences: A Brexit Diary' to Anthony Cartwright's *The Cut* (2017), from Ian McEwan's satirical Brexit novella *The Cockroach* (2019) to Amanda Craig's *The Lie of the Land* (2017). This so-called BrexLit according to Shaw either directly responds or imaginatively alludes 'to Britain's exit from the EU, or engage[s] with the subsequent sociocultural, economic, racial or cosmopolitical consequences of Britain's withdrawal'.[2] It does, however,

---

[1] Kirchick (2017), 5, 226.

[2] Shaw (2018), 18.

not exactly heal any of the fissures created by Brexit but by and large rather shows a tendency to reinforce the frictions that led to Britain's decision to leave.

Even if many people were surprised by the result of the referendum, this does not mean that the British policy, characterized by ostracism and division rather than by solidarity, came out of nowhere. Contrary to the sense of 'one of the biggest shocks in modern British politics', the referendum produced, 'the lines of division had been in the making long before the big revelation of June 2016'.[3] The causes for this disintegration are certainly multifaceted and scarcely within the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the EU border policy on the one hand and the UK's Hostile Environment Policy on the other will be briefly illustrated in order to trace at least some of the possible causes. It is necessary to make the magnitude of these policies of border demarcation and exclusion a bit more comprehensible in order to understand the degree to which the literature has attempted to and ultimately opposed these political ideologies and practices.

Material Border Policies

The foreign policy of the EU is not exactly characterized by an exuberant welcoming narrative. Instead, an 'intricate system of border security underpins Fortress Europe', a border system 'on which the EU plans to spend $38.4 billion between 2021 and 2027'.[4] The central role of border security in EU foreign policy is not a new development; in fact, the EU has already spent billions of euros in the past to prevent unregulated or illegal entry. Whether through physical measures such as guards, surveillance, or walls,[5] or through 'smart borders', all of these measures aim to secure the border externally and, contrary to what EU citizens often perceive, render the border itself impermeable, as hard borders. Legal regulations and rules, such as the Dublin Regulation and centralized databases, also contribute to reinforce both external and internal borders of the EU.[6] These regulations alone severely restrict the mobility of refugees within the European Union, but they have been supplemented with political measures ranging from interception at sea to joint border patrols, from readmission agreements to offshored immigration screening. The design of the Schengen area has two different but ultimately interdependent dimensions. Although internal

---

[3] Fox and Pearce (2018), 19; Heidemann (2020). Shaw also highlights that pre-Brexit Eurosceptic fictions anticipated the thematic concerns encapsulated by BrexLit, including the nostalgic appetite for (an admittedly false) national heritage, anxieties surrounding cultural infiltration and a mourning for the imperial past. According to Shaw, the various developments impacting British Euroscepticism are of a national and domestic, as opposed to international, nature. This Euroscepticism originates in a notion of British exceptionalism 'animated by a proud and melancholic rootedness in the glories of the nation's past', that enabled Eurosceptics to cite the nation's irreconcilable differences with the Continent that has developed in the immediate post-war years and lingered until the 20th century. Shaw (2021a, b), 5.

[4] Walia (2021), 108, Gifford (2020).

[5] By 2018, the EU had built 1,000 km of border walls since the fall of the Berlin Wall – in sum the equivalent of six Berlin Walls, cf. Walia (2021), 108, Stone (2018), Trilling (2019).

[6] According to Walia, 'smart borders' are the 'EU's primary mode of deterrence'. The Dublin Regulation obliges refugees to apply for asylum in the first country of arrival, a legal rule enforced by the Eurodac fingerprint and a biometric database, cf. Walia (2021), 108.

borders were opened for EU citizens, this supposed porousness was traded off by a fortification of external borders. Thus, the Schengen Agreement has largely increased mobility for EU citizens while curtailing legal routes for the rest, thereby creating a 'vast machine of illegalization'.[7] The harmonization of policies at the EU's internal borders has had a detrimental impact on ethnic minorities in Europe, such as the Roma, who as EU citizens can no longer apply for asylum within Europe and rarely receive redress outside of Europe.[8]

EU border policies are a complex construct that operate at a vast range of levels with the central goal of preventing, deterring, intercepting, and returning migrants and refugees at Europe's borders. One of the crucial yet morally dubious instruments of this policy is the externalization of EU borders.[9] The unstated aim of such a policy is to shift responsibility for border securing and policing outside the EU and thus ultimately escape accountability for practices that are immoral or illegal under national law. Inhumane or cruel conditions can be thereby conveniently shifted to other countries, as recently the case in the detention camps in Libya.

On an international level, there are several bilateral agreements that oblige neighboring countries to readmit deported refugees, such as the 1992 readmission agreement between Spain and Morocco or the 2016 agreement between the EU and Turkey – many of which violate the legal principle of non-refoulement and the international legal obligation not to forcibly return or expel refugees if they are persecuted on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.[10]

On a contractual level, it has become a standard within EU policy to make most development, aid, and trade agreements conditional on preventive migration control and the readmission of all deported persons.[11] This applies to African countries, but such a display of lopsided power is also noticeable towards countries seeking to join the EU, such as Ukraine and Moldova.[12] The unequal division of power, of course, also manifests itself in economic terms, in the many cases where non-European countries are guaranteed considerable monetary or economic rewards in exchange for reducing migration to Europe.[13] Other contractual agreements give access rather than providing specific measures such as the EU funded Atlantic Network which enables EU ships to access territorial waters of African countries, a liberty crucial to intercept and return boats as quickly as possible.[14]

---

[7] Scheel (2017), 43. So central is the reinforcement of external borders to the concept of the Schengen area that the admission of several Southern countries had to be postponed until they could demonstrate that they were capable of more effectively securing their external borders. Walia (2021), 108.

[8] Walia (2021), 108.

[9] According to Walia, border externalization has become a cornerstone of EU border policy since 2015. (2021), 108.

[10] Walia (2021), 108. Also cf. the 1951 Refugee Convention.

[11] Walia (2021), 109.

[12] Walia (2021), 109.

[13] Cf., for instance, the Khartoum Process or the Valletta Summit.

[14] The agreement also allows for joint maritime operations. Walia (2021), 112.

The reinforcement of European borders has also increased on a military level, as the EU border agency Frontex has expanded patrols and interceptions, a process technically sustained by the drone surveillance of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR). This also includes the EU-directed training of non-national forces, such as a new counterterrorism and anti-migration force.[15] This is not an isolated case. UK soldiers are training Tunisian armed forces, Italy has redeployed troops from Iraq and Afghanistan to Niger, Libya, and Tunisia, France has forces in Tunisia and Niger, Germany is training border guards in Libya, and French and German militaries are training agents in Mali.[16] In fact, the EU is providing 237 million euros to train the Libyan coast guard, according to the numbers made public by the Council of Europe.[17]

This wide range of policies in general, and of internal borders in particular, was severely re-enforced in the year 2015 as a result to the arrival of roughly one million refugees, mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria. In response to the large number of refugees seeking asylum, countries such as Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia upscaled internal border controls by erecting new material barriers or by refusing to adhere to the stipulations of European refugee redistribution plans.[18]

However, all these deterrent measures have not led to an overall decrease in refugees crossing into Europe, but the number of deaths on the central Mediterranean route has continued to rise as a result of the disastrous conditions in the countries of origin and the general increase in global migration.[19] The EU in general and Italy in particular responded to the increased number of arrivals as well as deaths – how could it be otherwise – by once again reinforcing their borders. Two maritime operations, Mare Nostrum and the militarized operation Sophia, were then deployed in the Mediterranean to stop the influx of refugees – the latter with a mandate to not only intercept but destroy migrant boats.[20]

Constructing/Fortifying the Fortress

The numerous and variable instruments of EU border policy operate not only politically, internationally, contractually, militarily, or technically, but function within an elaborate system of spinning an ideological narrative that serves the overall political goals. Most visible are perhaps those organizations deliberately put into place to deter migrants from leaving their home countries in the first place, in an effort to raise

---

[15] This is the case, for instance, with the G5 Sahel Cross-Border Joint Force, with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Cf. Walia (2021), 116.

[16] Akkerman (2018).

[17] Council of the European Union (2019).

[18] Walia (2018), 116.

[19] With 3,149 deaths in 2015 and 4,581 deaths in 2016. Cf. the Missing Migrants Project.

[20] Over the course of one year, 358 boats were destroyed. Eliassen and Pena (2016).

awareness about the 'risks of migration', or funded campaigns compelling migrants to agree to 'voluntary returns'.[21]

The reframing of questionable politics becomes also evident in the fact that those programs and partnerships that oblige allied but also frequently doubtful contracting partners are characteristically labeled in euphemist terms. The 'Migration Partnership Framework' explicitly integrates the EU's migration policy, designed for deterrence, into its foreign policy. Through the deceptively entitled 'Better Migration Management program', the EU manages to reroute billions of euros of the 'EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa' allocated for aid to twenty-six African countries into security and strategic military equipment to prevent refugees from leaving the continent.[22] And the G5 Sahel Cross-Border Joint Force is fittingly rebranded as 'African Peace Facility program'.[23]

Inspired by what Walia calls 'Australia's abhorrent Pacific Solution', according to which all illegal immigrants are brought (against their will) to offshore detention centers in bordering Pacific islands and often imprisoned there for years and years, the EU is now also offshoring refugees to 'transit processing centers' across the Sahel region. [24] The successful 'relocation' of the territorial border allows the legal use of frontier fortification measures that would be illegal under current law within the EU and has turned African countries into 'Europe's new border guards'.[25]

The criminalization of solidarity efforts is a further instrument to reframe the narrative in the context of EU border policy and to ultimately arrest illegal migration. In such a vein, NGO rescue boats are being fined and seized, and legal procedures commenced against aid organizations or helping individuals. Prominent cases include Salvini's policy of a 'war on migrants', trumped-up charges and trial proceedings against refugee aid workers such as captains Carola Rackete and Pia Klemp or Iranian refugee Sarah Mardini facing decades in prison simply for displaying a bare sense of humanity by rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean.[26]

The various instances of refashioning the political narrative are not without effect. The public discourse seems to follow suit with regard to producing a distorted image of the practical impact of migration into the EU: Barely '3% of African refugees make it to Europe' and despite the frequent decry of the 'end of the EU' by news headlines and the alleged breakdown of the Schengen Agreement by the simultaneous restoration of internal borders and border control, Walia is convinced that 'the

---

[21] Walia (2021), 120.

[22] Walia (2021), 109.

[23] Walia (2021), 109.

[24] Walia (2021), 109. For Australia's offshore detention centers, cf. for instance, Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* and his journalistic writing for *The Guardian*, Boochani (2017, 2018, 2019, 2021).

[25] Akkerman (2018). Sunak's current policy's 'stop-the-boats' slogan is identical to that used in Australia a decade ago as a recent BBC article illustrates. Cf. Turnbull (2023).

[26] Walia (2021), 119. Of the eighty-nine trafficking and smuggling charges across Europe documented for 2018 the majority of charges were brought against NGO search and rescue missions. Cf. Edmond-Pettitt and Liz Fekete, (2018). The Mardini sisters' flight from Syria to Germany is portrayed in Yusra Mardini's autobiographical book *Butterfly* (2018), and the film *The Swimmers* (2022) directed by Sally El Hoseini and produced by Stephen Daldry.

entire EU is unified in expanding maritime interdiction, preventing migration, and externalizing the border, especially into Africa'.[27]

The often-successful criminalization of solidarity efforts and humanitarian intervention of aid organizations and individuals finds its counterpart in the systematic equation of crime and migration. European politicians primarily advance the intention of 'destroying criminal smuggling and trafficking networks' as a justification for the warfare in the central Mediterranean, an attitude that is put forward almost identically by the Australian government and that in turn enables 'a European moral economy of salvation'.[28] In the European narrative framing, military operations are cast in a benevolent and humanitarian light to protect 'trafficked victims' from 'foreign' networks of 'organized crime'.[29] Such a portrayal conveniently obscures the fact that border restrictions create the conditions for this kind of exploitation in the first place; the abolition of border controls would practically remove any basis for human trafficking and could therefore be viewed as 'the primary force in constructing vulnerability'.[30]

The populist terminology not only serves to exculpate the state and often actually achieves a demonstrable decrease in the number of migrants and deaths, it also serves, in turn, very successfully the deliberate criminalization of solidarity, already mentioned.[31] Similarly, a popular analogy rebrands trafficking as 'modern-day slavery', thus rendering 'migrants and refugees more susceptible to exploitation' while 'bolstering white supremacist saviordom and racial modernity'.[32]

Clearly not limited to smugglers and traffickers, the criminalization of migration regularly extends to refugees. Therefore 'much of the public backlash' to migration is based on 'inaccurate and often inflammatory media accounts of the alleged predatory and anti-social behaviour of a group of people called "immigrants"'.[33] In contrast, their varied economic and cultural contributions to the development of the host states have been either downplayed or ignored altogether.[34] Ultimately, it is by means of European border policies, and the EU's reframing of the narrative that 'Migrants are at once rescued and caught', and EU-led enforcement operations for the sole purpose of migration control are disguised as humanitarian intervention.[35]

---

[27] Walia (2021), 127.

[28] Walia (2021), 117, Albahari (2016), 275–294.

[29] Walia (2021: 117–118), Anderson (2012: 1241-57).

[30] Anderson (2012), 1241–1257.

[31] An Amnesty International investigation into the criminalization of migrant and refugee solidarity found that police and prosecutors were manipulating flawed anti-smuggling laws to deliberately target solidarity efforts. Amnesty International Report (2020).

[32] Walia (2021), 118.

[33] Banda (2020: 283).

[34] Banda (2020), 283.

[35] Andersson (2017), 78.

Hostile Politics[36]

The exclusionary and segregationist policies of many EU states do not only take place at national borders, but also have a major impact on domestic policies. Many states have thus reacted to the increase in global migrancy[37] not only with migration and immigration policies in the narrower sense, but have abrogated their human rights obligations, to a degree that it impacts, if not always directly affects, wider sections of the citizenry.

The UK's 'hostile environment' policy was introduced by former Home Office Secretary, Theresa May, when, in 2012, she subsumed her intentions for what eventually resulted in the 2016 Immigration Act: 'The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration'.[38] The explicit aim of the policy was to make life unbearable for those perceived to be unentitled to live in the jurisdiction, 'to produce an environment in which personhood itself could hardly be sustained'.[39] What is characterized as a 'politics of exhaustion' by Escarcena, variously manifests itself 'in the construction of a hostile environment where certain forms of extreme, physical, and symbolic violence take place, whose fundamental objective is not to discipline bodies, but to reduce the possibilities of exercising vital autonomy as political autonomy'.[40] Enforced by two restrictive immigration acts in 2014 and 2016, respectively, specific measures included curtailing the access of unregulated refugees to services such as banking, health, and housing. The legislation was strictly administered by an operationalized regime and supplemented by high-profile campaigns, while many of the resulting instruments were deliberately aimed at making the life of the individual asylum seeker as uncomfortable as possible during the asylum process.[41] Such an *undignified* treatment of those within European borders was variously directed against persons who hitherto considered themselves citizens. Thus, hostile advertising campaigns were created, such as the Home Office's 2013 'Go Home' campaign, which urged undocumented people to leave the UK voluntarily or face detention or deportation. To disseminate the message throughout the UK, the government even deployed vans to further spread the slogans. Moreover, adverts were placed in 'eight minority ethnic newspapers, postcards in shop windows, and leaflets and posters advertising immigration surgeries used by faith and charity groups' in order to drive the hostile message home.[42] In the same year, the Home Office posted a tweet on Valentine's Day as a warning against illegal marriages: '#Rosesareredvioletsareblue, if your marriage is a sham we'll be on to you … #happyvalentinesday'.[43] If specifically directed only against illegal immigrants, this policy created a very

---

[36] On the Hostile Environment Policy in the UK, cf. also Zander (2023), 266–268.

[37] Banda (2020), 133. I am using the phrase migrancy to stress the fact that migration to many is a continuous state rather than an individual event or experience.

[38] May quoted in Herd (2017), 115. Cf. also Pink (2023), 328–329.

[39] Herd (2019), 189.

[40] Escarcena (2019), 215, 230–233, 234.

[41] Gibney (2011).

[42] Travis (2013).

[43] Sandhu (2019).

hostile atmosphere for all residents in the United Kingdom. With the 2018 Windrush scandal a few years later, it became painfully evident that the hostile policy also systematically discriminated against people who, despite their Caribbean background, had until then still considered themselves citizens, had lived, worked, and paid taxes in the UK.[44] As a result, there has been 'a marked increase in suspicion of minorities, which has resulted in a reported increase in complaints about race discrimination and racial profiling'.[45]

The restrictive immigration policy had turned private individuals and civil servants into immigration officials, and places of safety and support, i.e., hospitals, banks, and private residences, to border checkpoints.[46] As everyday activities were 'illegalized' for the migrant, a constant atmosphere of fear was created that unsurprisingly resulted in heightened racial discrimination. While access to most basic needs such as health care mostly remains in place, the right to social relations and movement within public spaces is often severely inhibited.[47] Such hostile politics are neither confined to the Global North or West, as Banda shows.[48] In the context of the UK, however, there seems to be an undeniable link between hostile politics, a fractured society, and the vote in favor of political division from the rest of Europe.

Policy that Divides, Literature that Unites? A Post-Brexit Kaleidoscope[49]

The policies of the two unions – the EU as much as the UK – have magnified the divide and generated fractures of various kinds long before Brexit. The literary projects selected for this contribution, so my central argument, offer an imaginative sphere for an alternative vision of communal reconciliation. Both a form of 'powerful

---

[44] See Gentleman (2019). Despite the public outrage at the discoveries, reparations have been partial and unsatisfactory, and the effects of the hostile environment policy continue to be felt by minorities. Cf. UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur', para. 52.

[45] Banda (2020), 132.

[46] UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur', paras. 52–61.

[47] Khosravi (2010), 90. The Rapporteur contrasted the draconian policies of the English government with that of the devolved states in the UK, highlighting policies and practices more compliant with human rights in Wales and Scotland. Cf. UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur', paras. 58–59.

[48] South Africa, for instance, has equally tried to restrict the rights of refugees to claim asylum or work. Refugees there also have been warned that they might be stripped of their refugee status, if they engage in political activism, including campaigning for political change in their home countries, a clear violation to the 1996 South African Constitution. Cf. Banda (2020), 133.

[49] As a reaction to the Brexit vote, Jeanette Winterson asserted her faith in the power of literature to alleviate the social rupture caused by the referendum: 'If we're living in a postfacts world – let's have better stories [. .] We can find a narrative that unites us, not one that divides us' as in Winterson's view 'every 'political movement begins as a counter-narrative to an existing narrative'. Winterson (2016)

commentary'[50] and of 'symbolic resistance',[51] these projects present various acts of welcome and solidarity determined to defy a hostile environment.

Whereas both projects are obviously concerned with borders and limits, they are far from reiterating either. More than merely implying the permeability of borders, they seem to suggest the border as a potentially productive place to facilitate encounter rather than division and where alternative visions of community and belonging are conceived and made possible. Yet neither the projects nor my readings should be misconstrued as a naive or overly celebratory praise of collisions of difference.

The EFACIS Kaleidoscope Series is of great symbolic resonance as it features various writers and artists from Ireland and collects their respective views and works ranging from essays to poetry and short fiction.[52] While Kaleidoscope 1 collected fiction authors' observations about the act of writing fiction from a European viewpoint, Kaleidoscope 2 inverts the perspective and features literary takes on what Europe means to the respective writers.[53] The eponymous 'Kaleidoscope' was chosen as it is 'both a scientific tool and a children's toy' which 'constantly transforms its elements into surprising configurations'.[54] The editors resort to the etymological origins of the term – 'kalos' for 'beautiful', 'eidos' for 'form' and 'skopein' for 'to see' or 'to aim' to account for a project that 'wants to produce beautiful forms which make readers revise old views'.[55]

The unique feature of this project, I would like to argue in the present context, is not so much the creative achievement of the individual author, but that any synopsis of all or several of the 42 individual contributions will always result in a new and varied overall image and thus ultimately also offer a different perspective on each individual contribution. Depending on the order, selection, or combination of pieces, completely new perspectives and patterns result every time one approaches them. The reading of a single new contribution can change one's view of others already familiar and vice versa. Since they all address the very same question but find diverse and sometimes contradictory responses, their kaleidoscopic status generates an unusually creative productivity.

There is Neil Hegarty's 'Burned' (2021), for instance, which considers Europe's history as one of burning, whether in the wake of the horrific violence during the Troubles, of libraries burned down during the Second World War as well as human flesh which was literally burned and scarred, but also the more recent conflagration of Notre Dame Cathedral. Despite its violent past, Hegarty's narrative is inspired by

---

[50] Rupp (2020), 698. In his article, Rupp illustrates how the invocation of the colonial archive, almost in spite of itself, has served to encompass rather than marginalize refugees. This intertextuality is part of a larger cultural intervention, Rupp argues, to counter the disruptive logic and national retreat of Brexit with new modes and manifestations of solidarity, forms that inscribe subjects on the move in the process of writing back to Brexit.

[51] Sandten (2020), 127–128, and 126 where Sandten writes that the Refugee Tales project aims also at transforming the historical English landscape into a hospitable space – in palpable contrast to May's hostile environment policy.

[52] European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS).

[53] Kaleidoscope 1 collected observations about the act of writing fiction by 50 authors of fiction.

[54] Schwall (2019).

[55] Schwall (2019).

the 'vision of the future articulated by John Hume', that is 'of a society that could learn from the past, that would embrace reconciliation, that could grow as a result'.[56] In Hegarty's view, the 'impulse behind the foundation of what is now the European Union' is that 'of a shared place, of a commonwealth', where borders are 'raised' but also 'erased' and where 'a utopian thread' was part of the 'founding vision', a thread that 'is holding'.[57]

There is Deirdre (Dee) Kinahan who 'watched' Ireland transform from a 'Catholic Caliphate' full of 'casting-out', of 'fear and cruelty', 'shame and misogyny, injustice and hypocrisy' to 'join the European Union, then known as the EEC' and thus 'splutter and gasp into modernity'.[58] Once a place that caused her 'fallen' sister to die in childbirth (turned away from hospital in life, from church in death), an 'Ireland turned only inward, succumbing to a brutal conservatism that destroyed the lives of countless citizens', this change seems only possible in a different time, once Ireland began 'to look beyond her borders, beyond her seas'.[59]

There is Pat Boran who subsumes 'The Meaning (and Sound) of Europe' as 'Countering' his 'occasional desire for certainties' as a reminder 'that there is much to be learned from not understanding, from being a little out of one's depth, from learning to pay attention to atmosphere and texture and nuance as well as meaning'.[60]

There is Mia Gallagher who considers 'Brave New Europe', herself, and Ireland 'not either/or', but 'liminal'.[61] There is Roisín O'Donnell for whom 'Europe is the edge of possibilities' at least for 'those of us lucky enough to be EU citizens', to those 'Europe provides both a landing mat and an escape route' as she claims in her 'Europe: A Love Story'.[62] There is Mary O'Donnell who '*was capable of being inspired by Europe, because it brought a sense of possibility*' as she writes in 'Bringing Snapshots of Europe into Focus'.[63]

And there is Evgeny Shtorn to whom 'Europe is a place where diversity meets freedom', but about which he also asks 'how much longer' it will 'be only in my imagination?', as he ponders 'How Did Europe Touch upon My Life?'[64]

It is, of course, impossible to give a comprehensive account of the many different genres, texts, themes, experiences, and ideas that the kaleidoscope encompasses, but I wanted to afford at least a few glimpses of this fascinating tool, even if they will necessarily appear here more like the pieces of a mosaic once I have presented them in a prescribed and no longer flexible pattern. In Kaleidoscope 2, from the edge of Europe, Irish writers turn their gaze on Europe, on its adversarial past, on its connectedness, as a bridging, unifying ideal and a dividing real. The border, that much is clear, is rendered inevitable, whether solid and immutable, or permeable and inviting.

---

[56] Hegarty in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

[57] Hegarty in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

[58] Kinahan in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

[59] Kinahan in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

[60] Boran in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

[61] Gallagher in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

[62] Roisín O'Donnell in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

[63] Mary O'Donnell in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022), emphasis in the original.

[64] Shtorn in Fogarty and Schwall (2019–2022).

The specific aesthetics implied in the kaleidoscopic arrangements of these works can be understood as a liminal aesthetic of sorts, playing with and always rearranging structures of limitations, transforming them into affordances and ultimately inviting their crossing and transgression. On such a reading, the Kaleidoscope project can be understood as bridging fiction,[65] a quality it shares with Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet and her subsequent *Companion Piece*.

Narrative Borders and Liminal Aesthetics in Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet

With her Seasonal Quartet, Ali Smith offers a set of 'condition-of-Britain' novels which trace various notions of liminal aesthetics. Composed and published 'at break-neck speed',[66] the quartet was praised for its timeliness and immediacy. The four intricately interconnected novels – *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), *Spring* (2019), and *Summer* (2020) recount recent events in Britain in a time of political turmoil and social unrest. The novelistic quartet was followed by a fifth instalment, *Companion Piece* (2022) that belongs to and continues the cycle, even if it deviates from the seasonal leitmotif and the interconnected cast of the earlier four pieces of the original *Quartet*. In such a vein, the novels (and the novella, if one prefers to characterize *Companion Piece* as such) respond not only to topical and emergent events, but touch on a wide range of pressing concerns, such as British politics and public discord, social media and populism, migration and detention centers in the face of Britain's hostile environment policy, Brexit and the EU, the Windrush Scandal, the Grenfell Tower fire, the murder of MP Jo Cox, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 'immediacy of composition' was part of Smith's aesthetic vision for the tetralogy, the novels chronicle events as they are unfolding, while at the same time embedding them within the broader context of British and European history.[67] In their deliberate effort at 'thinking aloud,' Smith's works are deeply interested in a series of present moments. By recounting British living history, Smith illustrates the country's existential divide on Brexit, immigration politics, and British identity.

On a thematic level, all five works are rendered as variations of the limit, whether territorial, cultural, personal, or temporal. The subsequent dislocation, fragmentation, and divisions are, however, not restricted to the novels' content but also reflected in the novels' form – a form as elastic as has become characteristic for Smith's works. This elasticity of form exceeds the novels' style and language as it seems to reconceptualize the limit on a generic level. While the novel has typically been regarded as a highly retrospective genre, Smith attempts to break down this very convention with her seasonal tetralogy as well as their *Companion Piece*. The UK edition of *Autumn* appeared in 2016, *Winter* in 2017, *Spring* in 2019, and *Summer* in 2020 – sometimes only a matter of weeks after she had submitted the manuscript. Smith's aim through-

---

[65] On 'Bridging Fictions' as an instrument that allows for a double crossing, the multilateral task of bridging both the ontological as well as the cultural chasm see Zander (2021), 287–308.

[66] Preston (2019).

[67] Pink (2023), 313.

out was to write and publish the novels as quickly as possible to reflect deeply on what we consider the reality of our present.

Writing BrexLit

Autumn, the first instalment of the quartet, was published in the wake of the Brexit referendum 2016. Short-listed for the Booker Prize 2017, *Autumn* became 'arguably the first significant post-Brexit novel,'[68] and the quartet as a whole ascribed to what Kristian Shaw has coined 'BrexLit'[69] – contemporary British fiction which critically reflects 'the divided nature of the United Kingdom as well as both the motivations for, and ramifications of, the referendum'.[70] A wide range of BrexLit was so far published – some by established authors such as Ian McEwan, Zadie Smith, Julian Barnes, Kazuo Ishiguro, or the late Hilary Mantel, who all seem to diagnose the UK with an innate yet imminent sense of emergency, symptomatic of a persistent feeling of crisis.

The temporal composition centers around the seasons as it advocates a natural progression of time that implies renewal as much as return.[71] Evoking the cycle of natural growth and decline, the *Quartet* seems to express an inherent hopefulness in the possibility of change and renewal. Such a reading poses a striking opposition to what Byrne has called the 'shocking emergence of a "Brexit Season"', 'a "never-ending story" that acted as a kind of suspension of seasonality itself'.[72] Repeated 'calls to action, cross-party talks, deadlines and final ultimatums have consistently resulted in stasis, deferral and a sense of déjà-vu', as Byrne writes 'with the political ramifications of the referendum result extending as an ongoing (non)event since the 23rd of June 2016, past many of its supposed hard deadlines'.[73] In such a vein, Byrne views Brexit 'as a dystopic, never-ending "season" of disorientation, disconnection and division'[74] or as the opening line of *Autumn* suggests in its bitter re-rendering of Dickens' famous opening line of *Tale of Two Cities* (1859): 'It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times. Again'.[75]

---

[68] Shaw (2018), 20.

[69] Shaw (2018), 15–30.

[70] Shaw (2021a, b), 3–4.

[71] Heidemann (2020), 678.

[72] Byrne (2020), 84. In a similar vein, Shaw speaks of the 'Beckettian experience' of 'Waiting for Brexit'. Shaw (2021a, b), 222.

[73] Byrne (2020), 84.

[74] Byrne (2020), 84.

[75] Smith (2017a, b), 3.

Narrative Borders

Even before Brexit, Smith was concerned with borders and boundaries, inclusions and exclusions, prevalent in the context of the citizenship vs. asylum divide.[76] Smith devotes herself both to fictional examinations in her writing but also to projects that have a much more activist orientation. Her 2011 novel *There But For The* is rendered as a biting satire on the politics of immigration, while her short story 'The Detainee's Tale', published 2015 in the first Volume of the Refugee Tales Project, formed part of an original kind of literary and political intervention dedicated to dismantling the policy of indefinite detention of immigrants in the UK. For five years, the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group has organized walks in solidarity with refugees, asylees, and immigration detainees and has by now published four volumes of *Refugee Tales*, written by various novelists and poets.[77] The project was thereby able to transgress some of the physical limitations that indefinite detention has imposed on refugees in the UK in enabling movement and allowing for multiple voices to share their stories. As author of and patron to the refugee tales project, Smith ponders the life-or-death significance that identity documents acquire as a key instrument to separate the ones on the in- from those on the outside, when her narrator in the 'Detainees Tale' asks: 'What kind of a life are we living on this earth when a photocopied piece of paper can mean and say more about your life than your life does?'[78] In *Autumn*, Smith revisits that question when her protagonist's identity comes to be in question: 'So, what does a piece of paper prove, exactly, in the end?'[79] The motif also reappears in the quartet's sequel, *Companion Piece*, when Martina Pelf is held up at the border, questioned and locked into an abandoned interrogation room for 7,5 h due to her dual citizenship, that prompts the border official to press her, whether 'one country' is 'not enough for' her.[80]

The overall narrative of the Seasonal Quartet is replete with physical and territorial boundaries, perhaps most notably in the various instances of incarceration in immigration removal centers, but also in the Hutchinson internment camp on the Isle of Man during World War II. *Spring* demonstrates the destructive power of a hostile immigration policy on the only country (formerly) within the EU that does not have a limit on the maximum period of detention. It does not only affect detainees directly, but its dehumanizing implications also extend to law enforcement officials, such as Brittany Hall, who works as a Detainee Custody Officer (DCO) in one of London's immigration detention centers for a private service provider.[81] Brittany's 'cynicism and callousness' seem to reflect the mental state of her nation, a reading that is empha-

---

[76] On Smith's concern with these issues, particularly the importance but ultimately also dangerous unreliability of identity documents, see Pink (2023), 317–323.

[77] For a more detailed account of Human Rights violations in the UK and the *Refugee Tales* Project as powerful statement of solidarity in opposition to the hostile policies of the UK, see Zander (2023).

[78] Smith (2015).

[79] Smith (2017a, b), 106.

[80] Smith (2022), 7.

[81] Indefinite detention violates the right to liberty and security granted in Article 5.1 ECHR.

sized by her being nicknamed 'Britannia' by a co-worker.[82] As Bridget Anderson has suggested in the context of migration and mobility, the most important border may not be the physical border, patrolled by guards and surmounted by a passport, but the conceptional border 'between citizen and migrant, between us and them'.[83]

The central image that reiterates the physical borders that have lately arisen throughout the country and that appears conversely across the four instalments is the fence – either randomly erected as in *Autumn*, chained onto by protesters as in *Winter*, or built around an immigration center in *Spring* or the British internment camp in *Summer*, respectively. In the first of these instances, in *Autumn*, the ominous electric fence is installed in open nature to usurp a piece of common land for an unclear – yet probably detrimental – purpose. The reality of present-day British society – this fence seems to suggest – is the loss of all belief and hope; instead narrow-minded framing, compartmentalization, and privatization lead to the drawing of lines and borders for its own sake, thus amounting to 'a new kind of detachment'.[84] Though heavily guarded by security, the fence is however not only a key symbol of this 'new detachedness,' but also transforms into a sign of hope and resistance as it elicits the political protest of Elisabeth's mother as the latter desperately and repeatedly attacks it with dog droppings.[85]

The physical detachment is further reiterated on a personal level. Initially, most characters seem divided by conflict, estrangement, or opposing political views. In such a vein, families in the quartet come to act as microcosms, which mirror the divisions of the society at large throughout post-referendum Britain. The referendum, or so it seems, has caused 'the end of dialogue'.[86] In *Autumn*, Elisabeth's mother is divorced and seems to have had only little interest in raising her daughter; in *Winter*, the estranged sisters Iris and Sophia are split across the remain or leave debate; *Spring* shows Richard's loss of his lifelong friend and love Paddy, as well as the disconnect to his daughter whom he continuously has imaginary conversations with; and *Summer* describes the dysfunctional Greenlaw family, in which everyone seems to be in conflict with everyone else. When Smith conflates Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in the following words, this evidently comes to serve as an allegory of the present state of the nation and its people:

> A play about a kingdom subsumed in chaos, lies, powermongering, division and a great deal of poisoning and self-poisoning, his mother says. Where everybody is pretending to be someone or something else, Lux says. And you can't see for the life of you how any of it will resolve in the end, because it's such a tangled-up messed-up farce of a mess. […] because it's like the people in the play are living in the same world but separately from each other, like their worlds have somehow become disjointed or broken off each other's worlds. But if they could just step out of themselves, or just hear and see what's happening

[82] Pink (2023), 327.

[83] Anderson (2013), 2.

[84] Smith (2017a, b), 54.

[85] Pittel (2018), 61, 63.

[86] Smith (2017a, b), 112.

right next to their ears and eyes, they'd see it's the same play they're all in, the same world, that they're all part of the same story.[87]

The Seasonal Quartet, however, embodies not only a negotiation of borders and boundaries but is equally animated by its 'thrill of perilous border crossings'.[88] Its drawing together of figures across the generational gap, from all political spheres and from across Europe, including the United Kingdom, can be understood as a symbolic transgression of the borders that would be erected around the UK with the implementation of Brexit on January 1, 2021.[89] Instances of documented and undocumented travel that appear in *Autumn* range from the opening images of tourists 'holidaying up the shore from the dead',[90] as bodies of adults and children wash up onto the beach, to the German woman in Nazi-occupied France with false identity papers,[91] and the children seeking asylum at the end of the novel, who are about to be sent to a detention center rather than housed in the community.[92] The cast of migrants includes among others the European Daniel in *Autumn*; the Croatian refugee Lux in *Winter*; Florence, the daughter of a refugee, in *Spring*; and arguably the detained refugee Hero in *Summer*.

In her writing against a hostile environment, Smith's quartet suggests a kind of 'post-territorial' *affective* world citizenship, based on 'humanity, community, dialogue, and compassion' as 'adequate response to all the political boundary-making'.[93] As we view a range of unlikely friendships, both acts of welcome and of solidarity, the network of stories and individual, but interconnected lives signals hope for the possibility of crossing borders, and of bridging divides. Whether lone or lonely, hope- or homeless, angry or abandoned – kindship and kindness of a shared humanity are counterposed against a reality of a post-Brexit kingdom with its many divisions.

Liminal Aesthetics

The quartet's concern with various instances of boundaries, divisions, and their ultimate permeability on a thematic level is uniquely continued on a formal and generic level. Read as one comprehensive work of art rather than four independent novels, the Seasonal Quartet arguably turns into an intricate narrative fabric that in the act of transgressing temporal, spatial, symbolic, and stylistic limits constitutes a highly original liminal aesthetics.

In her Goldsmith Prize lecture in 2017, Ali Smith conceived the possibilities of the novel in the following breathless sentence:

---

[87] Smith (2018), 200–201.

[88] Smith (2014).

[89] Grimes (2021).

[90] Smith (2017a, b), 12.

[91] Smith (2021), 64.

[92] Cf. Bennett (2018), 323, Smith (2017a, b), 254.

[93] Pink speaks of an 'alternative, affective notion of belonging', of 'affective citizenship' based on 'a common acknowledgement of values and responsibilities'. Pink (2023), 337.

> The novel is a form that takes time, flips time, gives us time, renews old matter, reminds you what life is and how layered and dimensional it and language and thought and being are, allows understanding, allows fellow feeling, analyses the notion of structure while being a structure of its own, demonstrates transformation, is micro and macro, by which I mean works on us synaptically and symphonically, and as a form always at the vanguard of its own form never stops finding the form to meet the needs of the time in which it is written and therefore the needs of all our time-cycles, the ones we're here on earth for, the ones that went before, the ones still to come, all from the pivot-point of the present moment, the no-time and the always, that each novel engages in and holds us through.[94]

Smith's fascination with time permeates the Seasonal Quartet. 'Seasonality', as Byrne suggests, 'addresses the "event" in the present, and in its insistence on a cycle embraces repetition and continuity'.[95] Smith's prime interest was to explore a tension between consecutive and cyclical models of the human experience of time: 'we're time-containers, we hold all our diachrony, our pasts and our futures […] in every one of our consecutive moments/ minutes/days/years, and I wonder if our real energy, our real history, is cyclic in continuance and at core, rather than consecutive'.[96] Her fragmented, non-linear narrative collage allows her to imitate such a cyclical vision, a notion that is reinforced through the persistent symbolism of the cyclical seasons. Various narrative strands interweave with one another, voicing a wide range of divergent experiences and viewpoints. Temporal as well as spatially flexible, this narrative structure also facilitates a wide range of literary and artistic references. Each instalment takes recourse to one of Shakespeare's romances; *The Tempest* in *Autumn*; *Cymbeline* in *Winter*; *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre* in *Spring*; and *A Winter's Tale* in *Summer*. Further literary references include Charles Dickens, John Keats, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, Lewis Carroll, Katherine Mansfield, and Rainer Maria Rilke, the references to visual arts Pauline Boty, Barbara Hepworth, Tacita Dean, Sandro Botticelli, and Lorenza Mazzetti.[97] It is in such a vein, that Harald Pittel suggests that the hope Smiths' novels invest in overcoming the deplorable state of society is also formally enacted. Smith's reality in the quartet principally eludes any endeavor to be fixed to one particular point of view. The non-linearity and multi-perspectivity of Smith's narrative 'takes the reader from dream to the everyday, a collage oscillating between past and present as well as life and death, amounting to a world in which memories and empathy are as real as any other experience'.[98] It is in 'the days of post-truth', according to Pittel, that 'Smith's imaginative realism seems to encourage,

---

[94] Smith (2017a, b).

[95] Byrne (2018), 86.

[96] Smith and Anderson (2016).

[97] These references continue in *Companion Piece* with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and E.E. Cummings' and Coleridge's poetry.

[98] Pittel (2018), 63.

in a way, a return to facts – *the deeper facts*, that is, reflecting an intersubjective sense of truth that is not simply arbitrary but authentic and solidary'.[99]

With her Seasonal Quartet, Smith clearly writes against a society built upon division, the very rifts that sever a nation into guests and hosts, into migrants and citizens but that also rip families apart. Whereas the divergent positions seem to split society at large, Smith's 'story-telling is not singular but an interweaving, an accumulation, a texture'.[100] Richly suffused with numerous intertextual references, the tetralogy and the subsequent novella might thus be read as Smith's very own meditation on inclusivity. Whilst each novel is different in terms of character and plot, in terms of political issues and personal conflicts, their aesthetic rendering seems to produce a continuity of form across the novels. It is in Ali Smith's *Spring*, that twelve-year-old protagonist Florence suggests an alternative conception of borders and belonging:

> What if, the girl says. Instead of saying, this border divides these places. We said, this border unites these places. This border holds together these two really interesting different places. What if we declared border crossings places where, listen, when you crossed them, you yourself became doubly possible. You're being naive, Brit says. In so many ways.
> I'm twelve, the girl says. What do you expect?

[101]The quartet as a whole resists any simple categorization in terms of existing genre markers. Smith's collage-like, fragmented narrative combines facts as well as fiction, past and present, individual memory and collective history, aesthetics and politics, social media, and canonical texts. The novels ascribe to as well as challenge more than one genre, in their adherence to but simultaneous departure of allegory or fable, satire or dystopia, modernist stream of consciousness, contemplation of art, and postmodernist collage of narrative techniques in their nostalgic invocation of the past. On a structural level, the different genres and modalities in the individual instalments present a set of textual limits, to be crossed and recrossed in the process of reading. The readerly act of border-crossing, however, does not merely result in a mixing or a synthesis of genres, but makes readers subtly aware of the full range of conventional techniques, narrative operations, and generic markers at work here – the very limits that are reiterated, negotiated, and challenged by Smith's tetralogy. Read as an intricate whole rather than four independent novels, the tetralogy becomes a unique narrative fabric that on a formal level embodies the transliminal vision it suggests on a thematic level. Taken from film plots, both popular and classical song, social media, history, newspapers, and television, Smith's overall narrative maps out various textual limits that – in the process of reading – come together as intricate quiltlike texture, a kaleidoscope that unites several 'really interesting different places'. Along its narrative borders, then, the Seasonal Quartet constitutes a highly original liminal aesthetics that allows the reader indeed – as suggested by twelve-year old Florence – to become 'doubly possible' – again, and again, and again.

---

[99] Pittel (2018), 63.

[100] Baker (2019), 102.

[101] Smith (2020), 196–197.

Variations of the Limit – Bridging Fictions, Intertextuality, and Belonging

The Seasonal Quartet, indeed, can be understood as a variation of the limit, which ceaselessly negotiates inclusion and exclusion, permeability and encounter, isolation and belonging – on both a thematic as well as on a formal level. This becomes particularly visible when *Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring* and *Summer* are less viewed as four individual, albeit interrelated novels, but rather as fragments of a larger, more complex, intricate body of work, that emerges from 'a dialectic between political borders and aesthetic orders'.[102] The borders negotiated by this kaleidoscopic project, in terms of politics as well as in terms of form, can thus be understood as a liminal aesthetic that does not prevent movement, but enables and proliferates it. As a consequence of the design as a four-volume quartet, the appearance of the fifth volume, *Companion Piece*, seems somewhat striking, especially since it neither connects thematically to the seasonal cycle nor to the characters devised in the other four volumes.[103]*Companion Piece*, however, is not intended to be the fifth instalment of the cycle, but represents exactly what is suggested by its title: Complement, coda, guide, advisor, comrade, travel partner.[104] It continues the literary project of the Seasonal Quartet, designed as a kind of running commentary on current events and temporally extends the scope to cover the lockdown period during the pandemic, which more or less hit at the same time the original quartet was completed. The sequel addresses a number of topical conflicts which range from domestic tensions and social inequalities to migration and climate change, in addition to the pandemic and the protective measures proper. The structure of the novel is hinged on a minimal pair, as if to imply that something as tiny as a single letter can change reality.[105]

Strictly speaking, not even a whole letter but a single line, generates the semantic difference between the two wor(l)ds – 'curfew' and 'curlew' and thereby a whole world of meaning that signals either the curtailing of freedom (as in curfew) or a symbol thereof as embodied by the migratory bird (curlew).[106] In Smith's novella, we find a whole chapter on the origins and varying significances of the word 'hello', while the book also traces the history of vagrancy in Britain as one where 'Labor was

---

[102] Nail (2020), 5.

[103] The novel nevertheless abounds with allusions to the previous ones. The narrator of the dominant narrative in *Companion Piece* is called Sandy, for instance, with a set of nicknames ranging from Sand to Shifting Sand or (the) Sands of Time. The last instalment of the quartet, *Summer*, featured an opening scene where we watched young Robert glue an hourglass to the hand of his older sister, so that she would always have 'enough time on her hands'. This is only one of many instances where an intertextuality is suggested rather than alluded to.

[104] The question of 'companionability', also rendered as 'companion able' resonates throughout the text and references, among others, dogs, small stones, beliefs, books, radios, and the girl Sandy's father used to encounter on his dog walks and who Sandy shares the exchange of a 'hello' with at the end of the novel. Smith (2022), 21, 26, 27, 28, 55.

[105] When Sandy is asked to explain the mysterious phrase her former friend Martina encountered by an unexplainable voice during her 7,5 h long incarceration at border control '*Curlew or curfew. You choose*' Sandy's associative response is tellingly as follows: 'Expedient. Juxtaposed. Zeitgeist. Difference. Dissonance. Consonant change'. Smith (2022), 21.

[106] According to the narrator '[t]hey call curlews local migrants'. Smith (2022), 118.

kept immobile by law, registered and tethered to a place much as poor people from the Global South are registered and kept tethered today' and where a young girl finds herself branded with the letter V, by a brand she herself had once made, 'heated and seared into her flesh' as 'a mandated punishment in those days, for the poor were not allowed to wander as they wished in Britain'.[107] Full of 'parables of foreignness',[108] a foreignness experienced by the character cast as much as it is felt by the reader, the novel begins on a triple uttering of this kind of 'welcome' and also closes on a final 'hello'.[109] Faced with multiple encounters with strangers, many of which strike as unwontedly intrusive (in that they appear uninvited on the narrator's doorstep or even her house), there is much need for and effort in the 'kindly welcome', the novella seems to call for.[110]

Companion Piece abounds in vagrants, vagabonds, and other wanderers, who seek and sometimes receive a kind of welcome despite their unwantedness – all of which seem to conceptually call into question the permeability of the physical border. Full of personal fractures and divisions implemented by a lack of compassion as much as by the pandemic, the novel signals a continuation of the communal idealism set forth by the Quartet as much as it suggests the connective potential of literature.[111] Novels and poems accompany the characters of Companion Piece just as much as the Piece acts as a companion to the reader and the original four novels – since it is through books that 'we can imagine ourselves otherwise'.[112]Companion Piece is a 'bridging fiction' in that it offers various instances of welcome as it weaves an intricate narrative fabric full of potential connections to the installments of the quartet.[113] Dedicated to 'embracing the indeterminate' and the conviction that 'a story is never an answer' but always 'a question', the novella seems to gesture towards a new beginning much more than to a conclusion – be it of the Seasonal Quartet or Companion Piece itself:[114] 'Every hello, like every voice – in all the possible languages, and human voice in the least of it – holds its story ready, waiting'.[115]

---

[107] Hamid (2022). Cf. the Ordinance of Labourers of 1349 and various subsequent Vagabonds Acts.

[108] Lucy Hughes-Hallett (2022).

[109] Smith (2022), 3, 227).

[110] The call for a 'kindly welcome' appears first in one of the epigraph's selected from Czesław Miłosz and is then reiterated by Sandy's father who tells her to 'Let them all in. Whoever. Always humour everyone who comes to your door'. Smith (2022), 65. Even 'if you don't like them', even if 'the people who've come to your door have come to beat you up', he tells her to 'Invite them in. Put the kettle on. What else you going to do?'. He demands for her to be 'Welcoming whatever is happening, whatever is going on'. Smith (2022), 66. According to Smith, 'The telling of stories is an act of profound hospitality' and a story 'has always been a welcoming-in, is always one way or another a hospitable meeting of the needs of others, and a porous artform where sympathy and empathy are only the beginning of things'. Smith (2016).

[111] 'I didn't care what season it was', Sandy says at the beginning of this sequel to the Seasonal Quartet. 'A string inside my chest snapped, much as if I was a small stringed instrument tuned too tight. […] But then it stopped hurting and after that nothing did and I no longer cared what season or what day', an emotion that echoes the paralysis many seem to have felt during the pandemic. Smith (2022), 4, 32–33.

[112] Smith (2022) 126.

[113] This somewhat echoes Bhabha's view that narration forces the reader to consider 'the cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation'. Bhabha (1990), 292.

[114] Smith (2022), 95, 155.

[115] Smith (2022), 95, 172.

Postscript

On March 10, 2023, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and French President Emmanuel Macron agreed on a new pact worth over £ 500 million to stop illegal cross-Channel migration, at a summit in Paris.[116] The agreement requires the UK to increase funding to France to allow hundreds more French police officers to patrol the English Channel, and also to install a new detention center as a further deterrent. It is the first time for the UK to co-fund a detention center in France to better manage the number of people who cross the English Channel irregularly. The new funding tranche from the UK this year is already more than double last year's tranche of over € 70 million, which was used to increase the number of French police patrols on the Channel coasts. Sunak is under intense pressure to reduce the number of asylum seekers arriving in the UK. Yet critics say the proposed legislation would not only make Britain an international outlaw on refugee rights (which it seems to be already) but push exiles to risk even more dangerous crossings and subject them to undignified treatment.[117]

This is yet another instance of EU and UK politicians seeking to keep firmly in place as much as reinforce the so-called Fortress Europe, rather than to address what forces subjects on the move to leave their country of origins in the first place. The power imbalance between the Global North and the Global South thereby remains intact, and the West once again presents itself as hostile rather than to fight the causes of migrancy and to allow for safe as well as regular routes of migration. This historic moment – like so many others since the infamous Brexit referendum – requires *Bridging Fictions* and *Liminal Aesthetics* more than ever – to overcome the ever widening and deepening chasms and higher climbing border fences – and perhaps it also requires a kaleidoscope or two – to produce *new* forms and *visions of togetherness* which may enable readers to revise old, divisive views.

[116] Grammaticas and Whannel (2023).

[117] Rankin (2023), Agence France-Presse (2023).

References

Agence, France-Presse. 2023. UN Warns Enforcement Alone Is No Fix for Migration Woes. *VOA News*, March 13. https://www.voanews.com/a/un-warns-enforcement-alone-is-no-fix-for-migration-woes/7002441.html (acc. March 21, 2023).

Akkerman, Mark. 2018. Expanding the Fortress: The Policies, the Profiteers and the People Shaped by EU's Border Externalization Programme. *Transnational Institute*, May 11. https://www.tni.org/en/publication/expanding-the-fortress (acc. March 21, 2023).

Albahari, Maurizio. 2016. After the Shipwreck: Mourning and Citizenship in the Mediterranean, Our Sea. *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 83.2: 275 – 94.

Amnesty International. 2020. Punishing Compassion: Solidarity on Trial in Fortress Europe, *Amnesty International*, March 3. www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR0118282020ENGLISH.PDF (acc. March 21, 2023).

Anderson, Bridget. 2012. Where's the Harm in That? Immigration Enforcement, Trafficking, and the Protection of Migrants' Rights. *American Behavioral Scientist* 56.9: 1241–1257.

Anderson, Bridget. 2013. *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Anderson, Eric Karl and Ali Smith. 2016. Ali Smith on *Autumn*, Brexit, and the Shortness of Life. *Penguin Features*, October 12. https://penguin.co.uk/articles/2016/ali-smith-on-autumn (acc. January 19, 2022).

Andersson, Ruben. 2017. Rescued and Caught: The Humanitarian-Security Nexus at Europe's Frontiers. In *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, ed. Nicholas De Genova, 64–94. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Baker, Harriet. 2019. A Living Thing. *Women: A Cultural Review* 30.1: 100–103.

Banda, Fareda. 2020. *African Migration, Human Rights and Literature*. Oxford: Hart.

Bennett, Alice. 2018. 'This Ridiculous Thing That Passes for a Passport': Seeking Asylum in Ali Smith's Fiction. *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12.3: 322–337.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1990. Introduction: Narrating the Nation. In *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, 1–7. London: Routledge.

Boochani, Behrouz. 2017. 'This Is Hell Out Here': How Behrouz Boochani's Diaries Expose Australia's Refugee Shame. *The Guardian*, December 4. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/04/this-is-hell-behrouz-boochani-diaries-expose-australia-refugee-shame (acc. March 21, 2023).

Boochani, Behrouz. 2018. Mohamed's Life Story Is a Tragedy. But It's Typical for Fathers Held on Manus. *The Guardian*, March 27 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/27/mohameds-life-story-is-a-tragedy-but-its-typical-for-fathers-held-on-manus (acc. March 21, 2023).

Boochani, Behrouz. 2019. How Many More People Must Die on Manus Before Australia Ends Indefinite Detention? *The Guardian*, June 3. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/03/how-many-more-people-must-die-on-manus-before-australia-ends-indefinite-detention (acc. March 21, 2023).

Boochani, Behrouz. 2021. For Eight Years, Australia Has Been Taking Refugees as Hostages. It's Time to Ask: Who Has Benefited? *The Guardian*, July 21. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jul/21/for-eight-years-australia-has-been-taking-refugees-as-hostages-its-time-to-ask-who-has-benefited (acc. March 21, 2023).

Byrne, Eleanor. 2020. Autumn, Winter, Never Spring: Brexit Season. *Open Arts Journal* 8: 83–94.

Council of the European Union. 2019. Central Mediterranean Route. *Council of the European Union and the European Council*, July 3. www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/central-mediterranean-route/ (acc. March 21, 2023).

Edmond-Pettitt, Anya and Liz Fekete. 2018. Investigations and Prosecutions for Crimes of Solidarity Escalate in 2018. *Institute of Race Relations*, December 6. www.irr.org.uk/news/investigations-and-prosecutions-for-crimes-of-solidarity-escalate-in-2018/ (acc. March 21, 2023).

Eliassen, Ingeborg and Paulo Pena. 2016. Operation Sophia: Mission Impossible in the Mediterranean. *Investigate Europe*, December 31. https://www.investigate-europe.eu/en/2016/operation-sophia-mission-impossible-in-the-mediterranean-2/ (acc. March 21, 2023).

Escarcena, Juan Pablo Aris. 2019. Expulsions: The Construction of a Hostile Environment in Calais. *European Journal of Migration and Law* 21.2: 215 – 37.

Fogarty, Anne, and Hedwig Schwall. 2019–2022. Kaleidoscope II. http://kaleidoscope2.efacis.eu/.

Fox, Stuart, and Sioned Pearce. 2018. The Generational Decay of Euroscepticism in the UK and the EU Referendum. *Journal of Elections Public Opinion and Parties* 28: 19–37.

Gentleman, Amelia. 2019. *The Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment*. London: Guardian Faber Publishing.

Gibney, Matthew. 2011. Asylum Policy. *The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford*, March 26. https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/primers/asylum-policy (acc. August 1, 2022).

Gifford, Charlotte. 2020. The True Cost of the EU's Border Security Boom. *World Finance*, January 21. www.worldfinance.com/featured/the-true-cost-of-the-eus-border-security-boom (acc. March 21, 2023).

Grammaticas, Damian and Kate Whannel. 2023. Sunak and Macron Summit: UK to Give £500m to Help France Curb Small Boat Crossings. *BBC. News*, March 10. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-64916446?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=KARANGA (acc. March 21, 2023).

Grimes, Nicole. 2021. 'An die Hoffnung': A Musical Footnote to Ali Smith's S*pring. Musicologica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies*, September 30.

Hamid, Mohsin. 2022. In a Sick World, Choosing Between Freedom and Restriction. *Companion Piece* by Ali Smith. *New York Times*, May 2. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/books/review/companion-piece-ali-smith.html (acc. March 21, 2023).

Heidemann, Birte. 2020. The Brexit Within: Mapping the Rural and the Urban in Contemporary British Fiction. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5: 676–688.

Herd, David. 2017. Afterword: Calling for an End to Indefinite Detention. In *Refugee Tales*, Vol. II, ed. David Herd and Anna Pincus, 113–123. Manchester: Comma P, 2017.

Herd, David. 2019. Afterword. In *Refugee Tales*, Vol. III, ed. David Herd and Anna Pincus, 183–194. Manchester: Comma P.

Khosravi, Shahram. 2010. *'Illegal' Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kirchick, James. 2017. *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Missing Migrants Project. Missing Migrants: Tracking Deaths Along Migratory Routes, *International Organization for Migration*, https://missingmigrants.iom.int/.

Nail, Thomas. 2020. What Are the Migrant Arts? *The Large Glass* 29/30: 5–9.

Pink, Katharina. 2023. Alternative Notions of Belonging: (European) Community and Citizenship in Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*. In *Europe in Law and Literature: Transdisciplinary Voices in Conversation*, ed. Laura A. Zander and Nicola Kramp-Seidel, 313–337. Berlin: DeGruyter.

Pittel, Harald. 2018. Fiction in Dark Times: The Brexit Novel and Ali Smith. *Hard Times* 101.1: 58–67.

Preston, Alex. 2019. *Spring* by Ali Smith Review – Luminous and Generous. *The Guardian*, March 19. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/19/spring-ali-smith-review (acc. March 21, 2023).

Rankin, Jennifer. 2023. Europe's Far Right Praise UK's Illegal Migration Bill. *The Guardian*, March 9. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/09/europes-far-right-praise-uks-migration-bill (acc. March 21, 2023).

Rupp, Jan. 2020. Writing Back to Brexit: Refugees, Transcultural Intertextuality, and the Colonial Archive. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56.5: 689–702.

Sandhu, Sukhdev. 2019. *Homecoming* by Colin Grant; *The Windrush Betrayal* by Amelia Gentleman – Review. *The Guardian*, September 29. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/29/homecoming-colin-grant-windrush-betrayal-amelia-gentleman-review (acc. August 9, 2022).

Sandten, Cecile. 2020. Refugee Tales: Asylum Stories and Walks as New Forms of Literary and Political Intervention. *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies* 31.3: 121–136.

Scheel, Stephen. 2017. 'The Secret is to Look Good on Paper': Appropriating Mobility Within and Against a Machine of Illegalization. In *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, ed. Nicholas De Genova, 37–63. Durham: Duke University Press.

Schwall, Hedwig. 2019. Kaleidoscope. https://kaleidoscope.efacis.eu/.

Shaw, Kristian. 2018. BrexLit. In *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*, ed. Robert Eaglestone, 15–30. New York: Routledge.

Shaw, Kristian. 2021a. Introduction: The European Question. In *Brexlit: British Literature and the European Project*, ed. Kristian Shaw, 1–34. London: Bloomsbury.

Shaw, Kristian. 2021b. Conclusion: Life After Europe. In *Brexlit: British Literature and the European Project*, ed. Kristian Shaw, 215–220. London: Bloomsbury.

Smith, Ali. 2014. Praise for *Artful*. In *Artful*. London: Penguin.

Smith, Ali. 2015. The Detainee's Tale by Ali Smith: 'I Thought You Would Help Me.' *The Guardian*, June 28. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/27/ali-smith-so-far-the-detainees-tale-extract (acc. March 21, 2023).

Smith, Ali. 2016. Welcome from Ali Smith, Patron of Refugee Tales. *Refugee Tales: A Call to End Indefinite Immigration Detention*. https://www.refugeetales.org/about (acc. March 21, 2023).

Smith, Ali. 2017a. Ali Smith's Goldsmiths Prize Lecture: The Novel in the Age of Trump. *New Statesman*, October 15. https://www.newstatesman.com/long-reads/2017a/10/ali-smith-s-goldsmiths-prize-lecture-novel-age-trump (acc. March 21, 2023).

Smith, Ali. 2017b. *Autumn*. London: Penguin [2016].

Smith, Ali. 2018. *Winter*. London: Penguin [2017].

Smith, Ali. 2020. *Spring*. London: Penguin [2019].

Smith, Ali. 2021. *Summer*. London: Penguin [2020].

Smith, Ali. 2022. *Companion Piece*. Milton Keynes: Hamish Hamilton.

Stone, Jon. 2018. The EU Has Built 1,000km of Border Walls Since Fall of Berlin Wall. *Independent*, November 9. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-border-wall-berlin-migration-human-rights-immigration-bordersa8624706.html (acc. March 21, 2023).

Travis, Alan. 2013. 'Go Home' Vans Resulted in 11 People Leaving Britain, Says Report. *The Guardian*, October 31. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/31/go-home-vans-11-leave-britain (acc. September 1, 2021).

Trilling, Daniel. 2019. *Lights in the Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe*. London: Picador.

Turnbull, Tiffanie. 2023. How Australia Wrote the 'Stop the Boats' Playbook. *BBC News*, March 18. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-64898507 (acc. March 21, 2023).

UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council. 2019. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* A/HRC/41/54/Add.2, May 27.

Winterson, Jeanette. 2016. We Need to Build a New Left: Labour Means Nothing Today. *The Guardian*, June 25. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/we-need-to-build-a-new-left-labour-means-nothing-jeanette-winterson(acc. March 21, 2023).

Zander, Laura A. 2021. Bridging the Gap? J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and André Brink's *States of Emergency* as/on Literary Contact Zones. In *East-West Dialogues: The Transferability of Concepts in the Humanities*, ed. Christoph Bode, Michael O'Sullivan, Lukas Schepp and Eli Park Sorensen, 287–308. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Zander, Laura A. 2023. A Host(ile) Union? Writing in Solidarity Against a Hostile Environment. In *Europe in Law and Literature: Transdisciplinary Voices in Conversation*. ed. Laura A. Zander and Nicola Kramp-Seidel, 259–278. Berlin: DeGruyter.

Authors and Affiliations

Laura A. Zander[1]

✉ Laura A. Zander
   lzander@wwu.de

[1] Collaborative Research Centre (SFB 1385), University of Münster (WWU), Domplatz 6, Münster 48143, Germany