

Novel Seasons: Regeneration through Nature and Art in the age of Climate Change in Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019)

Mémoire réalisé par
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Promoteur(s)
Ben De Bruyn

Année académique 2018-2021
Master ROGE2M, Finalité Approfondie

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1.0 Abstract

Aside from its role in Brexit literature, Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet joins contemporary novelists in tackling the climate change phenomenon by thinking about time, culture and nature. This thesis examines the ways three novels from this quartet depict an everyday experience of seasonal changes and environmentally inflected emotional distress. It discusses ecofeminist perspectives through Smith's representation of female artists and their artworks, which help think about our relationship with nature and living in chaotic times. Taking into account climate change's disruption of phenological patterns, this thesis explores Smith's ideas of weather, time and seasonality in the novels. In response to Glenn Albrecht's call for countering negative Earth emotions, this thesis analyzes how these novels counter environmental distress caused by climate change as well as emotions of indifference and detachment between people in present day post-Brexit society. The thesis examines how Smith's creative exploration of language, art, and nature encourages us to overcome emotional distress and take action against climate change and political injustice.

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the subject of climate change has gained attention across various fields, from the sciences to the humanities, including literature. Literary discussions of climate change have encompassed themes such as biopolitics (Vermeulen, 2014), climate migration (De Bruyn, 2020) and species extinction (Heise, 2016). The very question of how to tackle climate change has been discussed in the environmental humanities, not excluding its impacts of ecological deterioration, societal degradation, but as scholars argue, its debates are cultural as well as scientific (Higgins et al., 2020:1). The topic should be carefully dealt with on the scale of individual experiences as discussing climate change from this dimension might overlook broader ethical, political and scientific implications. Critics also point out that examining cultural forms, “narratives, vocabularies, images, objects and symbols” (Higgins et al., 2020:1) and emotions in response to climate change is meaningful. After all, climate change is happening not just in the past or foreseeable future, but more importantly, in the present. Therefore, how the next generation of people will establish their mentality in these changing times is an important question scholars and thinkers from the social sciences and humanities disciplines are finding solutions to.

The difficulty of writing stories that narrate climate change (in a way that considers impacts of both the macro and micro scopes) reflects the complexity of the climate phenomenon (Trexler, 2015; Johns-Putra, 2016). Traditional apocalyptic climate literature such as J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1962) or Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) cannot entirely portray these narratives. In the humanities departments, more and more critics are taking a look at this topic from a cultural perspective, by thinking about ways to respond to this complex question. In contemporary novels aside from traditional apocalyptic climate literature, critics (such

as Ben De Bruyn and Amitav Ghosh) have discovered more creative ways of explaining and representing the dynamics of climate change from the macroscopic perspective of structural problems and economic systems. At the same time, critics (including Zadie Smith and Stephanie LeMenager) also recognize the importance of everyday experiences from a microscopic perspective, as both perspectives are simultaneously crucial to more thoroughly understanding climate change. The connection between societal issues and the environment has received attention too, as a branch of literature that responds to the ideologies and societal influences of Brexit have emerged. Three novels in Ali Smith's so-called Seasonal Quartet, *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) are chosen as case studies in this thesis. They provide a creative way of examining climate change through themes of art, nature, and gender as well as point to the connection between the society and the environment. This thesis will analyze these novels to better understand the contemporary experience of climate change, as well as use supporting publications to rethink emotion, time, and nationalism, and how mediations through art, language and narratives can help re-imagine and face the climate change phenomenon.

Climate Change and Ecocriticism

Climate change or global warming has influenced environmental changes since the Industrial Revolution. Its direct results are worldwide natural disasters and gradual ecological deterioration to this day. Gradual ecological deterioration is exemplified by recent statistics from scientists in the Helmholtz Center for environmental research UFZ, which show that the emission of greenhouse gases is linked to the recent augmentation of droughts in more than 50% of the regions of Central Europe (2020). Whilst spectacular disasters include farmers in the northern regions of France experiencing forest fires previously known to occur only in the southern areas (Rissognol, Lowe,

Reuters 2020), and citizens in Greece on the island of Evia experiencing unexpected flash flooding due to thunderstorms and heavy rain (BBC, 2020). Global warming was first acknowledged by scientists tracking the increase of greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere leading to a rise in the surface temperature on Earth (NASA). However, in recent years, broader scientifically proven changes to the climate and biosphere surpass the idea of global warming (NASA). From a geological perspective, scientists have coined the term ‘the Anthropocene’ for this era (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000), marking the end of the Holocene. The Anthropocene defines this period of the planet as influenced by humans and is different from the Holocene by the increase in the impact of human activity on the planet. As the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution (1850-) have altered the cycles of carbon and energy in nature, they have also affected the “climate, biodiversity, land cover... properties of the state and function of the Earth system” (Raupach & Canadell, 2010:210). Phenomena such as rising sea levels, loss of ice in the Earth’s poles and glaciers, the extreme weather of hurricanes, wildfires, floods or droughts, as well as vegetation cover changes (NASA) are referred to as climate change impacts. These planetary changes directly alter the living space of humans and nonhuman species, which complicate the idea of ‘place’ or ‘home’. The concept of place is no longer conceived in “homogenized spatial, temporal, and historical terms” (Ryan, 2019:165). Therefore, this era is also described as the ‘age of dislocation’, where humans face displacement and a loss of ‘sense of place’ (Ryan, 2019:165). The implications of climate change and dangers of the Anthropocene are complex problems reflected not just in the ecological environment (atmosphere, oceans, and ecosystems), but also in societies (Trexler, 2015).

Next, I will provide a brief overview of the history of ecocriticism, which will help situate the discussion of climate change in literary studies. Ecocriticism is a subfield in literary studies that interrogates the relationship between literary texts and their

representations of the environment, further providing space to think about the relationship between humans and nature, and the notion of nature itself. It discusses the concept of place, the role of science and technology and the impact of human society on the environment, and combines themes such as gender, post-colonialism, and discusses the relationship between humans and nonhuman species including animals (Buell, Heise & Thornber, 2011). Before the emergence of ecocriticism in the 1980s, the environment in literary texts had previously been considered as a framing device in texts, as the background of human activities. In *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Lawrence Buell listed four criteria of environmentally oriented works. First, these texts show that “human history is implicated in natural history”. Second, these texts consider the interest of nonhumans. Third, the “ethical orientation” of these texts includes “human accountability to the environment”, and fourth, the text implies that the environment is a changing process (Buell, 1995:7-8). Following Buell’s preliminary ideas, in *The Ecocriticism Reader* Cheryl Glotfelty took an “earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty, 1996, xviii), by compiling an anthology of older and more recent ecocritical essays. Together with other literary critics, they foregrounded topics that were often backgrounded, paying special attention to the overlooked presence of animals, landscapes, and environmental risks in literary texts.

Under the influence of the environmentalist movements that originated in the 1960s, and in light of Buell and Glotfelty’s contribution (1990s), the further development of ecocriticism can roughly be described in terms of four waves. However, there is an “indistinct succession and concurrence of perspectives” (Marland, 2013:851) in the different strands of ecocriticism, which make the waves of ecocriticism more a palimpsest (Buell, 2005:17). In the first wave of ecocriticism, the focus of research was placed on non-fiction ‘nature writing’ by authors such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Annie Dillard and others. These authors took a more traditional perspective on

the definition of nature, privileging settings such as the wilderness, gardens, and forests. In the next phase of ecocriticism, the idea of 'nature' shifted towards more urban and post-natural settings where humans and nonhumans coexisted. From the second wave onwards, ecocriticism already surpasses the line separating human life and the natural world in traditional nature writing. It debates the ideologies of 'nature' and attempts to find ways of representation in the novel (Head, 2000:236). As Buell states that "ecocriticism becomes most interesting and useful ... when it aims to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere" (Buell, 2005:26). Aside from ecocriticism's turn from natural to post-natural settings, in Marland's "Ecocriticism" (2013), she mentions that thinkers of the environment also included two large branches, deep ecology and social ecology (Marland, 2013). Deep ecologists turned towards a bio-centric perspective to re-conceptualize the role of humans and other species (Naess, 1973) and social ecologists focus on environmental justice and oppression that are the causes of human's environmental dislocation. This distinction can partly be mapped onto the focus on the 'wilderness', and the other branch that focuses on 'post-natural settings'. These concepts shape the later waves of ecocriticism, which address the social construction of nature, and ideologies of gender, class and race, as in ecofeminism and post-colonial ecocriticism (Adamson & Slovic, 2009; Gaard, 2010; Barad, 2003).

From the third wave, literary environmentalism is seen from a global perspective, that turns towards 'eco-cosmopolitics' (Marland, 2013:854). These turns broaden ecocriticism to recognize the importance of discussing climate change. The third wave of ecocriticism addresses "all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint", and highlights the importance of "transcend[ing] ethnic and national boundaries" (Adamson & Slovic, 2009). Ecocriticism began with examining the environment of the wilderness, moving onto debating social aspects of humans and

nonhumans, and finally broadening its appliances to the global. In Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), Heise coins the term 'eco-cosmopolitanism', to express the idea that humans should acknowledge the impacts of climate change on the environment by considering both regional and global influences. This turn in ecocriticism is important because it promotes an eco-cosmopolitan form of readership that recognizes how the individual cannot be disconnected from the planet, as the regional 'place' is infiltrated by the 'planet', through transnational developments in society and flows of energy, waste, capitalism and digital technologies, as well as the "deterritorialisation" of culture around the globe. In her more recent work, *Imagining Extinction* (2010), Heise discusses the ongoing threat of biodiversity loss and its impact on contemporary texts and artworks. Emerging at the same time, the fourth wave of ecocriticism turns towards 'material ecocriticism' (Barad, 2003). Towards the end of its developments, ecocriticism becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, leading many people to prefer the phrase 'environmental humanities'.

As this overview indicates, ecocriticism has been slow to address global environmental issues such as climate change. From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon brought up the concept of slow violence. It describes "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight; a delayed destruction often dispersed across time and space." (Nixon, 2013). This definition frames the characteristics of climate change more concretely. The causes of climate change can be traced to before results of high level gas emissions are evident. The effects of climate change are spread over local and global locations into the future by thousands of years (Wenzel, 2017:503). This slow violence is shown in temporality, "as an unprecedented crisis in human history" but also in spatiality "as a global event" (Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011:2). Climate change has far-reaching impacts

that also “register indiscriminately on the bodies of the human and the nonhuman” and “disrupt[s]... the nature/culture binary and human social distinctions” (Marland, 2013:855). From Buell to Nixon, the focus of ecocriticism has shifted from foregrounding the presence of nature towards revealing ecological implications. However, the discussion of climate change gained a more central place in the field of ecocriticism after Timothy Morton’s (2007) call for the abandonment of a romanticized notion of the environment and literature. Ursula Heise (2008) points out the importance of “new cultural frameworks for understanding planetary systems” (Trexler, 2015). As other fields in the humanities started to address the topic of climate change more systematically, it led to a shift towards the “environmental humanities”.

In more recent studies, critics of the humanities departments have looked for ways to explore climate change. Certain scholars focus on scale and genre, as in *Planetary Memory in Contemporary American fiction* (Bond et al, 2017), literary critics bring attention to nonhuman entities and call for a ‘planetary memory’; others on energy and infrastructure, such as in “Realism 4°. Objects, weather and infrastructure in Ben Lerner’s 10:04” (De bruyn, 2017), and climate migration in “The Great Displacement: Reading Migration Fiction at the End of the World” (De Bruyn, 2020); still others on historical ties with capitalism and colonialism. In “Past’s futures, Future’s pasts” (Wenzel, 2009, 2017), Jennifer Wenzel illustrates how the Anthropocene destabilized concepts of time. Pieter Vermeulen (2014) also points out that climate change and biopolitics significantly influence trauma studies. These ideas recognize and attempt to explore the global and diverse influences of anthropogenic problems. These arguments in literary criticism encourage us to rethink the relationship between humans and nonhumans, memory and time, place and displacement under climate change. As this brief summary indicates, new ideas in the humanities are working towards engaging the climate change question in literature and culture, and demonstrate that thinking

about climate change is no longer simply a question for the sciences by discussing environmental catastrophes and technological failures.

In addition to literary scholars exploring climate change in ecocriticism, writers are trying to develop more creative responses to climate change in various forms of climate fiction. “[N]ovels espouse the idea that climate change is either fact or fabricated...the circulation of climate change through the novels shows it is both real and fabricated.” (Trexler, 2015). Trexler indicates a cultural transformation of texts that encourages imaginative processes to engage with scientific data (Trexler, 2015). On Portland’s KBOO Community Radio, Stephanie LeMenager speaks in an interview on climate fiction and art. She explains that this is a world that needs stories, and that fiction is a direct place to explore the complex aspects of climate change (LeMenager). Climate change is addressed and understood through fictional narratives, although representing climate change in literature is not an easy task, as it requires writers to integrate scientific knowledge and incompatible scales of reality. First, narrating stories of climate change is not an easy task. After all, ecological phenomena seem to be “at odds with ... categories like emotion, narrative... [and] language” (Bond et al, 2017:857).

Long before the specific genre of ‘climate fiction’ emerged, older novels attempted to tackle general environmental issues. The rise of global warming in the late 20th century inspired novelists’ interests in ecological issues such as extinction, nuclear contamination, and environmental pollution. These growing environmental problems were already addressed in popular genres of fiction, such as science fiction, fantasy or dystopia (Johns-Putra, 2016). These included J.G. Ballard’s novel *The Drowned World* (1962), Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1986), George Turner’s *The Sea and the Summer* (1987), and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993). These novels treated climate change as a “general environmental problem, alongside

deforestation, urban development, toxic waste...” (Trexler, 2015). As scientific evidence of the presence of climate change and an anthropogenic planet in recent years increased the awareness of the Anthropocene crisis, it led to a more systematic treatment and more focused exploration of ‘anthropogenic climate change’ in novels. In the last fifteen years or so, in fact, a distinct subgenre of climate fiction has emerged, known as “cli-fi” (McBride, 2018).

This recent trend of climate change novels explores challenges of the Anthropocene by picturing futuristic dystopian or post-apocalyptic settings, including Steven Amsterdam’s *Things We Didn’t See Coming* (2009), Paulette Jiles’ *Lighthouse Island* (2013), Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013), James Bradley’s *Clade* (2015), and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* (2012). In his review of cli-fi novels in *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015), Trexler points out that these themes invite “new organizations of human beings to emerge...[that] alter the forms and potentialities of art and cultural narrative” (Trexler, 2015). While he recognizes the capacity of the novel “to interrogate the emotional, aesthetic, and living experience of the Anthropocene” (Trexler, 2015), he maintains that climate change novels should include different forms and genres. In this more recent trend of cli-fi novels, societal division and psychological distress are common aspects which highlights the loss of connection between humans and the environment as well as intra-human tensions. However, they have not received much attention. Just as academic publications on climate change have shown the need for cross-disciplinary thinking, Trexler suggests that ways of telling climate change stories need to be broadened. He discusses the necessity for novels to turn from presenting purely scientific facts to examining the political management of climate change, and to dealing with culture.

In line with Trexler’s suggestion, critics have argued that even clifi is not fully able to address this complex topic in fiction, and that we should hence broaden our

understanding of climate literature as it is not a very clear-cut, standardized genre or category. First, defining climate change fiction as a genre raises problems. “[T]he genre helps construct the meaning. And yet, climate change necessarily transforms generic conventions...novels about the Anthropocene cannot be easily placed into discrete generic pigeonholes.” (Trexler, 2015). Critics point to the need to broaden the category of cli-fi. De Bruyn (2020:4) argues that to move the climate change discussion “beyond cli-fi”, it would be beneficial to consider multiple subgenres of contemporary literature such as historical, realist, or military fiction. For example, in novels by Ben Lerner, Annie Proulx, and Mohsin Hamid, he argues that the theme of climate change is explored through unconventional angles related to history, infrastructure, and war. (De Bruyn, 2016, 2017, 2018). Secondly, the literary representation of climate change phenomena requires new strategies. The cli-fi genre is criticized of being insufficient of representing this issue. It is arguable that the imperceptibility of its impacts set back immediate responsiveness of texts, and the multiplicity and complexity of scales and forms of agency make demands of literary representations. As the novel itself is an innovative medium (Ali Smith, 2017b), its narrative form is also crucial to its representation. Stephanie Lemenager (2016) reminds us that one of the functions of art and literature that is often overlooked is the reimagining of the future as a fundamentally open-ended phenomenon. She points out the importance of novels to the younger generation, asserting that climate change novels play a crucial role in helping young people to gain new perspectives of the future climate generation.

As Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall (2014) point out the dual realization of climate change’s direct effect on humans and vice versa, the impact on both climate change and on humans would be even clearer. Exploring and understanding climate change is a double dimensional process reflected in literature. However, the perspectives of these climate change narratives influence a great deal of how readers will perceive reality.

Cory Doctorow (2020) writes that instead of creating narratives for the sake of spectacular plots that turn humans against each other or against nature, it is the goal and responsibility of fiction writers (especially science fiction) to reveal the truth that humanity is good (Doctorow, 2020). Climate literature had been criticized for its tendency to focus on futuristic stories about an apocalyptic situation. Critics point out that climate change is also an ongoing everyday experience that requires attention to the present. Critics such as Namara Smith (2017) argue that discussing climate change should not stay fixed on the macroscopic topoi of natural disasters, but also be brought closer to individual experiences that discuss the ordinariness of climate change. The celebrated novelist Zadie Smith (2014) reminds us that individual experiences and personal losses due to climate change should be remembered. In “Elegy for a Country’s Seasons” (2014), Zadie Smith points out the lack of intimate words to describe climate change induced sentiments as well as the problem that existing stories of climate change focus on spectacular events and adrenaline fueled responses of people. Widely shared feelings triggered by the deterioration of the environment are overlooked as “minor losses...[that] don’t seem worth mentioning – not when compared to the visions of apocalypse conjured by climate scientists and movie directors” (Zadie Smith, 2014). As Kate Marshall writes, truly felt experiences of climate change are linked to the weather and seasons, and as seasons and plants embody the cycle of natural time, emotions responding to climate change are often linked to the direct impact of living under unfamiliar seasons and disrupted environmental time.

These discussions raise questions about experiencing cyclic time and unfamiliar seasons. They also prompt us to ask, what about ‘now’? How are humans facing this loss of familiarity due to climate change? These debates point to the discussions on emotions that are part of everyday life rather than spectacular natural disasters and apocalyptic scenes. In Kari Norgaard’s *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions,*

and *Everyday Life* (2008), she observes in Nordic society the problem of living a ‘double life’, and the difficulty of acknowledging climate change’s impacts even in a community that accepts the fact of global heating. It is part of a broader set of texts dealing with emotions, and with the fact that information alone does not suffice in responding to climate change. The paper “Stories vs. facts: triggering emotion and action taking on climate change” (Morris et al, 2019) also points out that statistics that show the impact of climate change do not help with positive thinking, and that fictional stories were more hopeful of encouraging people to take action. Stephanie LeMenager (2016) notes that academics, thinkers, and writers are challenged to explore emotions, fiction and culture in hopes of finding new tactics to deal with the present reality of climate change. Therefore, it can be concluded that discovering narratives which discuss the everyday experience and people’s emotions in climate literature is necessary, which set the stage for the case studies I will present below.

Case studies: Ali Smith’s *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019)

After presenting some of the most important debates on climate change in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities, I will provide an overview of the case studies that this paper will examine in order to advance our understanding of genre, emotion, and seasons. I have chosen the recent works of Scottish writer Ali Smith: *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019), which are the first three novels from the so-called series the Seasonal Quartet as my case study. These novels simultaneously capture the themes of an everyday climate change and challenge the question of ‘genres’ for climate literature. In the topics that will be introduced below, I will justify the choice of selecting three novels out of the quartet, and explain how these three novels focus on the central idea of regeneration that this thesis aims to discuss. In the following paragraphs, I will first introduce the themes and narrative techniques in Ali Smith’s

earlier works.

Ali Smith is an ecofeminist writer, whose earlier work, *How to be both* (2014) has won the Goldsmiths Prize 2014, Women's Prize 2014, Saltire Society Literary Book of the Year Award 2014, 2014 Costa Novel Award, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize. She is known to combine several themes such as politics, art, environmentalism, feminism in her narratives (Liebermann, 2014). Although her work has been criticized for not always sending a clear message (Namara Smith, 2017), in the novels *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019), she has found a way to represent climate change's complexity (through the combination of these themes), and through her representation of politics and its interrelation with the environment (Namara Smith, 2017).

Her earlier works, such as *Like* (1997), *Hotel World* (2001), *Artful* (2012), and *How to Be Both* (2014), are typical for their reflections on literature, art, and cultural resonance whilst portraying an environmental consciousness with a wisp of a "ghostly return of dead loved ones" (Liebermann, 2014:137). Kostkowska (2013) describes Smith's writing technique as using a 'microscopic particularity' that treats the nonhuman subjects in detailed description, whilst smoothly adapting Danne Polk's (2001) concept of a "symbiotic body" (Kostkowska, 2013:107), which refers to the way Smith describes all entities whether human or nonhuman as interconnected and inclusive in her story plots. "[Smith] constructs the external "world" of the characters' physical environment...to reveal the inherent, underlying reality of connection and collectivity." (Kostkowska, 2013:107). Smith also uses a modernist technique of stream-of-consciousness (Gezels, 2017:5), which refers to the narrative technique that portrays the thought process of a character in the form of an interior monologue. Following these earlier works, *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) discuss elements in art and themes in literature, revitalize stereotypical gender roles,

contrast personal and cultural memory, as well as highlight broader ecological observations and specific climate change impacts.

In addition to Ali Smith's favoured themes and techniques, she experiments with narrative time again in the novels *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019). The series is set and was published in real-time, meaning that the setting of each book is written in line with their narrative times. These novels immediately respond to current societal and environmental crisis in the UK, beginning with Brexit in the immediate aftermath of the referendum in *Autumn* (2016). As Ali Smith speaks about the Seasonal Quartet in an interview, "since the novel as a form is always about time, and since the name we've given to the novel form also means new, something new... so new it's news...[the novel] ask[s] structural questions of the form" (Anderson, 2016). Smith experiments with her novels through 'serial fiction' (Calder, 2019) to explore 'time' under climate change and Brexit's societal upheaval.

Autumn's reflections on Brexit automatically wins its place among the works of other authors such as Jonathan Coe (*Middle England*, 2018), Melissa Harrison (*All Among the Barley*, 2018), and Barney Farmer (*Drunken Bakers*, 2018). These different strands of 'Brexlit' novels form a new movement in contemporary British literature (Ferguson, 2019) which explores the influences of Brexit across a variety of genres. Brexlit novels include a variety of themes, such as national identity, historic pasts, fascism, and English masculinity. The Seasonal Quartet is commonly known for its place in Brexit literature, as it contains reflections on social disintegration, and problematic authoritarian politics. Like other Brexit literature, the novels *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) follow the present events in the UK but insert into the plots historical events that mirror the present political crisis. Smith's use of unchronological narrative time is useful here, as her reflections on time allows the novels to not be "blindsided by events...[but] attuned ...to the spirit of their times"

(Preston, 2020).

However, Ali Smith's approach to Brexit also differs from her contemporaries. Whilst Harrison's *All Among the Barley* (2018) is set in a recent wartime past and depicts a nostalgic rural countryside, Ali Smith's novels *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) are set in the present and value the imagination and inspirations that art can bring to regenerate characters' perspectives. Smith's approach to Britain's place after Brexit also differs from that of Paul Kingsnorth. Whilst Kingsnorth celebrates rural sceneries in Britain that are linked to cultural memories of a glorious past (Kingsnorth, 2015), Smith emphasizes a broader understanding of nature and art, pointing to both local and global awareness of societal injustice (including the issue of refugees) and environmental revitalization. The novels *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) examine ways of understanding and living in times of climate change and a post-Brexit Britain, by proposing to rethink time, seasons, art and literature.

Now I will address four topics that I will confront with these three case studies in the following paragraphs, namely time and seasonality, environmental emotions, art, and immigration. The three novels *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) make particular cases for the emotional impact of climate change on the everyday lives of individual people. These narratives respond directly to the everydayness and intangibility of climate change, as well as deal with environmental emotions. In contrast to the violent fantasies of future post-apocalyptic settings, here we find narratives set in the present time representing ordinary experiences shaped by climate change. They search for hope through the re-imagination of seasons, plants, and functions of art and language.

The first aspect of Smith's works that I will introduce is the theme of seasonality and time. Each of the novels in the Seasonal Quartet is set in a different season, starting with *Autumn* (2016) and ending with *Summer* (2020), and they accordingly address the

seasons of the year. However, this thesis will only discuss the first three novels. Although the fourth installment of the quartet completes the narratives and the theme of seasonality, the main argument of this thesis is not a re-understanding of the seasonal cycle, but to analyze how Smith discusses ways of regeneration through imagination of specific elements in nature, as detailed examples in the first three novels will show.

As climate change has changed how seasons are experienced, these novels explore the meanings of each season after weather and environmental time have been defamiliarized by human activity. Scholars have addressed the influence of climate change on seasons and environmental time in the last two centuries. Environmental time is marked by phenological indicators such as the behavior of animals, the migration patterns of birds, the flowering dates of plants, changes in temperature, and scent of foliage. Phenology is an important concept that refers to the study of the rhythm of seasonal processes. In Sarah Dimick's paper "Disordered Environmental Time: Phenology, Climate Change, and Seasonal Form in the Work of Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold" (2018), she identifies the works of Henry J Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) and later, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), to show how recordings of regional phenology patterns have influenced narrative form. Dimick points out that Thoreau's observation of seasonal changes of the environment helped to identify the 'typical' seasonal rhythm of plants' growth cycles, and Leopold recognized that meteorology cycles corresponded to cycles of wildlife populations. Yet climate change has now destabilized phenological patterns. The impact of climate change on seasonal time was noticed by the biologist Primack, who recorded the regional flowering dates in Concord, dates that had moved from May to April between Thoreau's time in *Journal* and 2012, shortening the period of winter (Dimick, 2018:701). These topics of phenology and disruption of seasons under climate change are important, as they provide the foundation for my discussion of experiencing alien seasons under climate

change in the case studies of Ali Smith's works.

Autumn (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) highlight the importance of seasonality and changing experiences of natural time and rhythms. The changes of environmental time are acknowledged as a present reality, as characters face their emotions, strive to redefine seasonality and look for ways to adapt. These novels will relate to the irregular seasons, and each title attempts to define their corresponding season. The seasons are partly recognizable, as the novels examine the seasons through typical weather phenomena and cultural connotations such as fertility and death. However, they also appear to be partly unfamiliar, as they are also destabilized for political and environmental reasons.

Broadening the theme of seasonality, the concept of 'time' is crucial in these novels. Jennifer Wenzel (2017) explains the connection between climate change and time. She writes that the Anthropocene "make[s] strange our understanding of pasts, presents, and futures" (2017:502) as it

destabilize[s] the straightforward, secular assumption that pasts and presents have futures, that things just keep on going, that time and history keep unfolding, whether according to the certitudes of a progress narrative or the more flat expectation ...in which moments follow after each other like beads knotted on a string. (Wenzel, 2017:502).

Autumn (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) challenge this concept of time as "homogeneous" (Walter, 1999; Wenzel, 2017). First, in each of these novels Ali Smith uses classical literary themes from Shakespeare's plays and Dickens novels. These literary themes and references reuse language to show how moments in time repeat themselves, but are treated differently in each situation. The beginning of *Autumn* echoes settings in *The Tempest* (1623) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). The novel continues a dystopian allusion by featuring Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932),

but later, it uses Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to symbolize the characters' transformation. *Winter* takes from *Cymbeline* (1611) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843) to depict a dark political time of fake identities. Characters are haunted by ghosts as well as lies that they are manipulated by the news (and forms of media) to believe in. The novel's depiction of environmental pollution in the modern day also echoes passages from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). The third book *Spring* contradicts Dickens' line from *Hard Times* (1854): "Now, what I want is, Facts". *Spring* says this society does not want facts. The novel also takes themes of migration (and journeys) from *Pericles, prince of Tyre* (1609). An immigrant character (Florence) who resembles Shakespeare's heroine Marina connects the immigration theme and seasonal connotations. Ali Smith says that "[t]he novel is a form that takes time, flips time, gives us time, renews old matter, reminds [us] what life is and how layered and dimensional it [is]" (2017b, para.1). These themes in the novels help discuss time in order to resituate times of climate change and rethink life on Earth.

At the same time, these novels reflect on the macroscopic cycle of time and propose different ways of taking action in the present. *Autumn* views the cycles of time and life from a continual cyclic perspective. It illustrates the cycle of plants' lives to show how time continues after bodily death. *Winter* opposes this idea of seeing time as cyclical, pointing out the urgency to stop societal and environmental deterioration through political activism. In *Spring*, the connections of time and life are seen as mysteries beyond human control, but hope can still be found in the unexpected powers of nature. These different views on the cycle of time are explored through fragmented unchronological narrative time in these novels. Smith works with the idea of distorted time in the Anthropocene, and uses this particular narrative form to present new ways of writing about climate change.

A second important aspect of Smith's work that will be discussed is the

environmental emotions that climate change provokes in humans. From a scientific perspective, E.O. Wilson first acknowledged in *Biophilia* (1984) that the relationship between humans and their habitat has a psychological influence on individuals. In *Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World* (2019), Glenn G. Albrecht explains that there are “life-affirming and cooperative emotions” (Albrecht, 2019:91; 2020:22), such as soliphilia, which is “the love of the totality of our place relationships, and willingness to accept the political responsibility for protecting [them]” (Albrecht 2019:121). However, ongoing destruction of the ecology has caused more negative emotions to become dominant (Albrecht, 2019). In “Mapping the Solastalgia Literature: A Scoping Review Study” (Galway et al, 2019), researchers have identified symptoms and psychological problems in response to climate change, such as solastalgia, eco-anxiety, eco-grief, eco-angst, eco-paralysis (Albrecht, 2005; Cunsolo and Ellis, 2018; Warsini et al, 2014). These emotions of anxiety, grief, and fear (leading to paralysis) are related to a “changing and uncertain environment” (Albrecht, 2011:49), and overwhelm people by the scale and complexity of the problems (Albrecht, 2011). Along with ‘Ecological grief’ (Clark, 2020:61), these psychological impacts can be identified in *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019).

Albrecht’s work is helpful in analyzing negative environmental emotions (as well as positive emotions) that might underpin forms of social protest and environmental activism. He suggests two ideas that are productive to countering these problems. First, he argues that the ‘battle of emotions’ between the positive life affirming emotions and the negative distressful ones is a process for humans to come to terms with the reality of climate change, in order to proceed with clarity and take action (Albrecht, 2020:24). Second, in “Exiting the Anthropocene and Entering the Symbiocene” (2016) and “Negating Solastalgia: An Emotional Revolution from the Anthropocene to the Symbiocene” (2020), he describes an era called ‘Generation Symbiocene’ that would

replace the Anthropocene. The Symbiocene emphasizes possibilities of counteracting negative effects such as solastalgia as well as the increasing factors of “anthropogenic climate warming...and the global rise of anti-environmental and authoritarian politics” (Albrecht, 2020:21).

Based on these discussions, I will identify environmental distress and ways of countering them in these novels. Among negative Earth emotions that characters in the novel experience, emotions such as environmental nostalgia and melancholy are the most profound. The term ‘Solastalgia’ was coined by Glenn Albrecht in 2003 to describe the

recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation [...] an intense desire for the place where one is a resident to be maintained in a state that continues to give comfort or solace. (Albrecht, 2005:48)

First used to describe the distress of people in the case of Upper Hunter New South Wales open cut mines, solastalgia has been generalized to apply to other situations of people and their local environments. It attempts to describe the ‘lived experience’ of a “feeling of dislocation” and of being undermined by forces creating this change (Albrecht, 2005:48). Smith’s central idea that runs throughout these novels coincides with Albrecht’s argument that the need to confront solastalgia is urgent, and that it is crucial to see that “solastalgia is an emotional state that can be countered and overcome” (Albrecht, 2020:20), in contrast to the prevalent belief that climate change can only lead to more grief and despair.

Albrecht’s terms (solastalgia and Generation Symbiocene) and beliefs (that winning the war of emotions produces emotional clarity) are useful to analyzing how

Smith treats the same problems in her fictional work. Much in the same vein, Albrecht's earlier notion of Soliphilia "highlights the role of political commitment and collaboration to the practice of protecting and conserving those places that we love ...fighting to return damaged places back to a state that delivers solace and defeats solastalgia" (Albrecht, 2020:20-21). This notion of active environmental politics will be discussed in Smith's novels through characters who protest against environmental destruction.

A third aspect that will be examined in these novels is the way they draw attention to art and use art to explore the impact of climate change, especially in terms of people's emotions. Solastalgia has been explored by artists through experimental installations such as in Ann Finegan's publication of "Solastalgia and its Cure" issued in the September issue of *Artlink* (2016). It focuses on 'restorative art' that aims to search for the 'commons' and a relationship between humans and nature. In this collection, the idea of 'eco-arts' is directed towards the possibility of 'planetary repair' first by finding the possibility to express loss for the 'commons', and "a panic for which there is no panacea within the capitalist machine" (Finegan, 2016:28). This notion of eco-arts can be contrasted to what Smith hopes to do with language and art in the novels, noticeably in the way she deals with visual arts in the form of a literal collage in *Autumn*.

In these novels, art takes on a curative role for characters who are suffering from the emotional distress caused by personal, political and environmental problems. The artworks and artists that Smith features in her novels are not always directly related to environmental concerns, but these artworks contain elements of nature, and are related to gender. Smith allows her characters to wield a powerful imagination that transforms their understanding of these artists and the messages that these artworks convey. Smith views the function of art in these novels as higher than simply for treating single problems, although they seem to be the cure for environmental distress or problematic

political ideologies in these cases. Smith's idea of art being political (Elkins, 2019) is relevant here. Smith uses the "prisms of art and imagination" to "refract political questions" (Ley, 2020). These political questions include (but are not limited to) climate change and Brexit. In these novels, she exemplifies how art can become inspiration for characters to become creative and positively active in their treatment of problems in life in all aspects of life (including personal and environmental). James Ley writes in the Sydney Review of Books that,

[Smith's novels] conceptualise art ... as a manifestation of humankind's innate mythopoeic consciousness. Central to Smith's response to the darkness of the times is a belief in the priority of art, a belief that we are ... art-makers, storytellers, fashioners of our own worlds. She has long been fascinated with art's ability to seize and direct the awareness, impose a sense of form. (Ley, 2020).

Smith adapts this regenerative power in art to rethinking language as different forms of creativity that allow them to reshape the way they perceive realities.

Among many references to artists and artworks in these novels, only some will be mentioned in this thesis. Each of these three novels most noticeably features a 20th century female artist and her artwork(s), which will become central to the theme of each novel. These female artists and their artworks which will be discussed in this thesis include Pauline Boty's 'The Only Blonde in the World' (1963) in *Autumn*, Barbara Hepworth's sculpture 'Rosewall' (1963) in *Winter*, and Tacita Dean's 'Montafon Letter' (2017) in *Spring*. Smith re-imagines these classics of European artists (as well as the canonical literary texts that were mentioned earlier). These sources of inspiration point to how European culture is interrelated to these characters living in Britain. While these artworks can be connected to Smith's exploration of emotions, creativity and hope in the novels, Smith also uses literal metaphors and the concept of photography to imagine capturing a moment in time and how these moments can bring about change. These

ideas all point to hope and taking action in the present.

Finally, the fourth aspect that will be discussed in these novels is the theme of migration and borders. As climate change is rooted in a capitalist, petrol-consuming world that is based on a traditional gender politics and authoritarian ideology, and as these problems are also connected to Brexit, the novels *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), and *Spring* (2019) combine themes of social disintegration, immigration complications, racial injustice and political ruptures to discuss the interrelation of climate change and the present societal crisis. Smith points to how the British society under Brexit is inevitably facing increasing problems of migration and borders, and that there is a current rise of racism and fascism that need to be resolved.

The novels imply that the British society is in fact constituted of immigrants. The protagonists in *Autumn*, Elisabeth Demand and Daniel Gluck as well as Paddy in *Spring* are of non-British origins. The novels also depict immigrants to the UK without close friends or family such as Lux in *Winter*, and Florence in *Spring*. These characters are knowledgeable and crucial to the story plots as they bring insightful enlightenment to the situations that other characters are facing. The novels frequently return to a fictional corporation, the SA4A. It is a mysterious company that performs tasks such as erecting wired fences (borders), and enforces refugee removals. In situations where characters cross paths with this corporation, they reflect on how violence in the society has become acceptable. Related to recurring cycles of violence, a problematic perspective towards gender is also plaguing the society. Smith's suggestion for thinking about these societal problems is by proposing a symbiotic way of regarding people, society and nature. This idea is consistent with her ideas of thinking about nonhumans and the relationship between humans and nature, which will be discussed in the first chapter discussing *Autumn*.

Aside from thinking about migration in relation to Brexit, reflecting on the theme

of migration is also productive to thinking about environmental problems. Climate migration as well as people's experience of solastalgia due to dislocation are related to social and economic forces, which are results of deliberate political policy (Albrecht, 2020:20). Albrecht writes that the way to counter these "policies and political decisions" are "grounded in personal and community action" (Albrecht, 2020:20). These ideas are in line with the novels' representations of environmental activism. As Smith says that every action is political, whether people know it or not (Elkins, 2019), and as Smith's novels are themselves political (Ley, 2020), the novels present various ways of expressing political views and intervening with policies through personal political activism and group actions (such as protests).

Now I will provide an overview of the structure of this thesis. The first section will provide an analysis of *Autumn*, the first book in the Seasonal Quartet. *Autumn* begins with a post-referendum Britain, it first touches the feelings of nostalgia for a simpler past, pointing to how political ruptures and climate change problems are causing more complicated forms of environmental emotions. It discusses the ways language, art (including images and colours) can help reimagine how to find inspiration and hope through nature. Using the motif of plants, *Autumn* reimagines the relationship between humans and nature. The second section discusses the second book *Winter*. *Winter* contrasts political positions towards nature, especially highlighting the different ways of being politically active towards the environment. It brings together the tension and debates between so-called remainers and leavers (Pittel, 2018:65) as well as between environmental activists and passive 'nature' writers. Turning from plants to soil and stones, the re-imagination of these natural elements awakens an environmental awareness in distressed characters. The third section introduces *Spring*. *Spring* further articulates the theme of refugees, immigration and discusses the concept of borders. It reveals problems of racism and injustice that are commonly accepted in the society.

This novel uses the imagination of mountains to transform despairing situations into possibilities. At the same time, the novel depicts the political and environmental situation as something that cannot be controlled by humans, and shows how hope will be nurtured in creativity.

As these novels respond to societal and environmental issues that have developed in real-time over the course of the last few years, they point to ways climate change can be examined in daily lives, and how the novels innovate ways of representing climate change. As opposed to emphasizing negative environmental, psychological, and societal destruction caused by climate change, Smith revives hope, inspiration and creativity to counter these detrimental forces through imagining feminist art rooted in nature, and regrouping words and language. These novels suggest looking at the problems of borders and migration through imagining ways of co-existence. Building on existing research, this thesis examines how these novels rethink climate change realities reflected in seasons and emotions to realize a hopeful future on the planet in the Anthropocene, whilst attempting to develop new strategies to narrate the contemporary experience of climate change.

2. Metamorphoses: Plants, Visual Art and Language in *Autumn*

Smith says in her Goldsmith's Prize lecture (2017b) that the novel "allows the time's articulation to be layered, complex, full of all our paradox and ambiguity as a human race, laced with the possibility of transformation". Smith's novel *Autumn* explores the present societal and ecological issues from thinking about human life in the cycle of nature, and how moments of regenerative hope are what it takes to move from a static perspective to a transformative one. After briefly introducing the plot and characters of the novel, this chapter will first identify some problems under climate

change in *Autumn*, such as unfamiliar seasons and rising sea levels, and describe resulting environmental emotions. Next, I will discuss topics of gender, age, and migration and examples of regeneration that are productive to thinking about climate change and society after the referendum in *Autumn*. After exploring these themes, this chapter will present a scene that explores the tension between regeneration and destruction in detail. This chapter ends with highlighting *Autumn*'s note about change, by way of viewing time as static or transformative.

Beginning this series with *Autumn*, the novels start in the middle of a cycle rather than at the more traditional season of spring. It indicates that time is always in the process of moving, and the beginning is already chaotic. The beginning of *Autumn* is described as the 'worst of times' (3), and constituted of things feeble, almost dead, such as ragged leaves and bodies washed ashore (3). This setting implies that a 'metamorphoses' will take place throughout the narrative plot. The plot focuses on two characters, Elisabeth and Daniel Gluck. Daniel Gluck is a 101-year-old man who is the former neighbour of Elisabeth and her mother, and Elisabeth is a lecturer of art history who grew up having a solid friendship with Daniel. In the story's present narrative time, Daniel and Elisabeth are in a care centre where Daniel is in a comatose state, and Elisabeth comes to visit him. This setting creates a mismatched space for the characters to reflect on their memories and their realities without actual dialogue. Typical of Smith's style, the narrative time in *Autumn* is unchronological, as the story frequently shifts between flashbacks and the present. As the narrative focalization also shifts between each character, this creates a time lapse in the storyline from each character's memory and current reality, and this allows the characters' memories of the past and reflections in the present to be seen in a new light as the story progresses. In Elisabeth's childhood, Elisabeth's conservative mother cannot imagine how Elisabeth and Daniel can have a healthy friendship discussing art and philosophy. In the present narrative

time, Elisabeth's mother is paralyzed by environmental fear and overstocks antiques in her house. However, her attitude changes later in the novel, as she becomes an active protestor against building the new security fence on common land and she fights for the rights of immigrants. *Autumn* is about metamorphoses through the process of imagination, as throughout these episodes of memories and present reflections in the novel, Elisabeth and Daniel continue to engage in imaginary conversations discussing art, language and nature that transform their perspectives on time, society and the environment.

Autumn presents a troubled society under the constant threat of climate change as well as facing the aftermath of the referendum. Smith uses intertextual references to classic works of literature to create a strong resonance. The beginning line of *Autumn*: "It was the worst of times..." takes a similar setting from Dicken's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) to set the scene for the sense of gloom encompassing the British society after Brexit, not illuminating the level of destruction (forest fires, toxic pollution, species extinction) in the environment. The scenes in the novel illustrate changes between the new and old times, which highlight a sense of alienation in the society. In an early scene, the novel depicts Elisabeth looking at a municipal building which had been the old Post Office that has now been transformed into a row of designer chain stores. In the same scene, she deals unsuccessfully with frustrating paperwork to renew her out-of-date passport. This scene hints at a complex set of problems in the society, beginning with people's identity being reduced to textual documents and the disappearance of communal space.

Autumn discusses how climate change has changed the environment and shows the characters' environmental distress. In the first example, Elisabeth's mother thinks of the old films that Daniel used to show by setting up a screen and projector in his back garden on summer nights, "I'd look out the window, it'd be a starry night and they'd be

sitting in a little box of light...That was back in the years when we still had summers. When we still had seasons, not just the monoseason we have now.” (215). *Autumn* depicts nostalgia not only caused by unfamiliar seasons, but also caused from the worrying truth of climate change’s permanent alteration of the landscape. On an old map from 1962, Elisabeth’s mother points to “a spot quite far inland” (54), saying “[t]hat’s where the World War II pillbox fell into the sea ten days ago” (54). The lack of coastal defense against rising sea levels is one reason amongst others that causes characters to experience eco-anxiety. The experience of characters in *Autumn* exemplify what Glenn Albrecht identified as ‘solastalgia’. First, the novel depicts the notion of solastalgia by describing a loss of familiarity, and the feeling that treasured moments are over abruptly. In a scene where Elisabeth visits Daniel again, she notices how “today Daniel looks like a child, but one with a very old head” (112). She reflects on memories from her childhood times, and thinks of “the flat dry place where the circus had had its tent” (115). This scene describes a memory from when she was thirteen years old. She and Daniel had walked past a field that had held a summer fair and circus shows. She describes the feeling of loss,

now you couldn’t tell that any of these summer things had ever happened. There was just empty field. The sports tracks had faded and gone. The flattened grass, the places that had turned to mud where the crowds had wandered round between the rides and the open-sided trailers full of the driving and shooting games, the ghost circus ring; nothing but grass. (115)

Autumn is a season typically related to the feeling of ‘melancholia’. The novel describes Elisabeth “doing melancholy things like that” (115). However, in line with Albrecht’s explanation of solastalgia, the novel identifies how melancholy or nostalgia could not fully describe this feeling that things were simply lost in the cycle of time.

Somehow this wasn’t the same as melancholy. It was something else, about how

melancholy and nostalgia weren't relevant in the slightest. Things just happened. Then they were over. Time just passed. Partly it felt unpleasant, to think like that, rude even. Partly it felt good. It was kind of a relief. (115).

It signifies how societal changes and environmental destruction may be causing reactions beyond human emotion and more related to a sense of detachment. A passage in the novel combines this overall sense of doom, and expresses a profound sadness for the loss of simplicity in these rapid changing times:

you can't just be a child and cycle away because you're off to the shops any more. Or if there's a happy man or woman driving a car, just out driving, enjoying it, nothing else happening... then she is probably definitely about to crash or die... Probably he or she one way or another is driving to his or her doom. (26).

The passage indicates that there is no place for anyone as innocent as a 'child', and to do something as simple as 'cycle to the shops' in these times anymore. Elisabeth and her mother both notice that there is an underlying sense of hostility and mistrust between people in the society now. This passage also refers to the stereotypical fate of females, linking back to the masculine account of the Profumo affair which exemplifies an aggressive and masculine perspective of denouncing the other sex: "Or if it's a woman, to be abducted and come to a gruesome sexcrime end, or to disappear." (26). As the Profumo affair indicates, prejudice of gender are not new issues, however, the novel shows an overall sense of premonition that prominent perspectives of gender have become increasingly threatening. The references to gender, violence, and the environment as a whole implies that ecological violence also fits into a broader pattern of violence. The novel depicts societal changes following Brexit and under the dangers of climate change casting a shadow over the current times.

Although Smith acknowledges climate change's worrying presence, she doesn't paint a despairing picture. In the following paragraphs, I will explore themes of gender,

migration (immigrants), time and age, and explain how Smith combines these themes to think about finding hope and reshaping people's realities in the novel. The novel regenerates the traditional and stereotypical perspective on gender, through retelling the Profumo Affair that happened during the cold war. In a lengthy descriptive scene, Daniel fantasies about the scandal of Christine Keeler by focalizing through Keeler. His imagination of Keeler's story differs from what was seen as a scandal from a traditional masculine perspective at that time. Not only is this event retold from a feminine perspective, rethinking about gender helps to convey *Autumn's* idea about hope. As Daniel says, "[w]e have to hope... that the people who love us and who know us a little bit will in the end have seen us truly. In the end, not much else matters." (160). The novel seems to say that in the grand flow of time, the things that matter and last are the small connections and little transformations that reveal one's truth in each point of time.

Next, the theme of migration in the novel also conveys the idea of hope through a transformation of characters' perspectives. First, living in a small rural village, Elisabeth's mother had been suffering from societal distress and paralyzed by fear (Pittel, 2018) in post-Brexit Britain. From living with a conventional mindset (we can tell from her objections of Elisabeth and Daniel's conversations about art and imagination) and aimlessly watching shows of antiques on TV, later in the narrative, she leaves her obsession of antiquities and actively uses these antiquities to attack a security fence that imprisons immigrants. This fence is established by the corporation SA4A. It has also created a prison-like building to keep immigrants without legal documents in. Second, *Autumn* refers to this theme of immigrants with subtle hints. Daniel and his sister Hannah have Germanic roots whilst Elisabeth's surname 'Demand' and the way her name is spelt with an 's' instead of with a 'z' point out her name has French origins. In another scene, Elisabeth notices that the staff working at the care centre are from Eastern Europe. The novel describes these pieces of information with a

positivity that signifies this is a society with a diverse composition.

In the same concept as regenerating gender and migration, the themes of time and age in the novel also points to ways of finding hope. Smith explores the contrast between human lifespan and the sustainability of nature as well as the transition between generations. Both threads help people understand one's place in a limited lifetime on Earth. Smith's idea of hope that outshines dark aspects of life weaves throughout the novel. In Hannah's letter to Daniel, she writes,

Hope is exactly that, that's all it is, a matter of how we deal with the negative acts towards human beings by other human beings in the world, remembering that they and we are all human, that nothing human is alien to us, the foul and the fair, and that most important of all we're here for a mere blink of the eyes, that's all. (190).

This passage emphasizes on the contrast between human lifespan against nature. It points out that in the brevity of a lifetime on Earth, what humans can do to make their given time meaningful is in actions of kindness and love towards ourselves and others. Smith's idea of a symbiotic world is shown here. Her message is that people should honour 'the human condition' including all of humanity's kinks and weaknesses, whilst at the same time, people should consider an inclusive attitude towards nonhuman entities of nature such as plants in *Autumn*.

Extending the novel's point about time, a difference in age (or generation gap) is an underlying theme in *Autumn*. The age of Elisabeth and that of Daniel are wide apart, as they are from two different generations. For Elisabeth, Daniel functions as an inspiring role model that is a steady anchor throughout her life. Daniel represents the role of a prophet and the 'old world' that is about to phase out. In his dreams he lingers between his present life and an apocalyptic future that he hallucinates. His consciousness flows between language that sound like recitals of classical literature and biblical verses, "naked as the day I was born are the words in the head he moves on its

neck” (3) and “throw the bottle in the sea, the bottle’s made of me, I’m the hardest grain to harvest to harvest” (3). Elisabeth acts as Daniel’s young confidante. She observes her troubling surroundings and finds inspiration from philosophical debates on art and nature (which she learns from Daniel). Daniel’s philosophy inspired Elisabeth to pursue a life of artistic enlightenment. As a grown-up in the present narrative time, she continues to refrain from the society’s ‘new detachedness’ (Pittel, 2018), which is influenced by capitalism, societal diversion and climate change.

Autumn reflects a transition between generations. In the care centre, Elisabeth imagines showing Daniel the book she’s reading, which is Aldous Huxley’s “*Brave New World*” (1932), to which Daniel would reply “Oh, that old thing.” (29) She imagines herself replying, “It’s new to me.” (29). *Autumn* borrows the dystopian theme from Huxley’s novel, symbolizing the psychological alienation and societal disruptions that Elisabeth is experiencing in this ‘new world’. Daniel is about to depart from this life and Elisabeth only entering middle age. The turning point of their relationship in Elisabeth’s memory is when she realizes the distance between them. In one scene in the novel, Daniel tells her that “memory and responsibility are strangers...Memory always goes its own way” (159). Elisabeth understands from Daniel’s speech that he doesn’t return her feelings. She feels a great disappointment over their relationship, and she leaves the catalogue of the artist Pauline Boty’s art with Daniel. However, between these transitions of time in the novel, Elisabeth overcomes her disappointment and comes to terms with the different realities between Daniel and herself. Later in the novel, when she visits Daniel again, she has begun reading Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. At the end of the novel, she also redeems her hope in recovering Pauline Boty’s artwork. The novel is about changes of perspectives and redeeming hope in transitions of time. Also referring to the season of autumn as a time of metamorphoses, it is helpful to think about a transition of seasons in the lives of the two characters. This theme of

‘metamorphoses’ links the themes of gender, migration, time, (and in the following paragraphs) seasons, language, art and plants throughout the novel. Facing the permanence and irreversibility of the Anthropocene and the present situation in British history, the novel challenges readers to think about moments in time that offer the possibility regeneration amidst the rush of the century, capitalism’s fast beckoning, modernity’s fast paced shifts, and anthropogenic anxieties.

Aside from thinking about the metaphoric ‘metamorphoses’ of the season autumn, the novel also uses visual descriptions of seasons and colours to regenerate hope in the face of people’s distress under climate change and Brexit. As Adam Trexler points out, “the Anthropocene...indicates a cultural transformation” (2015). Stephanie LeMenager also suggests that hope in climate change could be found in art and literature. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss detailed examples of regenerative transformations (using colours, images and language as versions of nature) and rethinking plants. To begin, *Autumn* uses the symbolism of colours white and green to illustrate imagination and transformation of the seasons and to reimagine climate change.

In the novel, white symbolizes space for creativity, minimalism, as well as environmental distress. First, the novel uses the symbolism of white to reimagine problems under climate change. In the novel, working as a lecturer of art history, Elisabeth acknowledges that after years of work she is still living in the rundown rooming house she had been living in when she was a student. She finally comes to accept that she can never buy her own house. She points out that this is the case for young people of this generation; they are typically without their own houses or a future to dream of. On the other hand, the novel points out that only the rich or people with wealthy parents can afford to have their own house to live in. In one scene, Elisabeth imagines everything in the rundown house painted white. She imagines the whiteness expanding to fill places such as “holes in the floor”, both sides of the floor boards, and

“[she] goes outside to paint [the] high hedge white too” (37). When Elisabeth imagines painting green plants on top of the white colour with Daniel, the rundown house is no longer a shabby space with limitations of the reality, but a space of possibility that can be afforded with imagination: “Now we can sell this space for a fortune. Only the very rich can afford to be this minimalist these days” (37). Pointing back to overflowing ideologies of capitalism and materialism in the current society, the novel acknowledges that ‘minimalism’ is what the society needs but is lacking now.

Next, the colour white also symbolizes the ecology, by reflecting emptiness and loss of life in nature after environmental destruction. In the novel, the scene at a rundown house of complete whiteness takes place in Elisabeth’s imaginations whilst in reality, she is sitting beside Daniel in the care centre. Here, the whiteness is not a positive environment, but an empty space that Elisabeth feels trapped in. Facing her own reality, Elisabeth imagines “what looks like liquid excrement... spreading very close to her bare feet...she tries not to step in any of it.” (39). Her imagination reflects her fears of Daniel sinking into a coma and departing from life. In Elisabeth’s imagination, she sees Daniel leave, “[h]e’s always just too far ahead. The whiteness goes on forever ahead of them. When she looks over her shoulder it’s forever behind them too” (38). This scene of white symbolizes a planet devoid of life and species. It echoes the whiteness of a ‘non-place’ that is also depicted in eco-artist Fowler’s installation *Hunger* (2007), which shows the species on the planet disconnected to any environment and walking in a complete white space, as if being “out of their element, remnants of some past, set down like specimens, in a strange voided world” (Finegan, 2016:30).

In the third example, the colour white symbolizes a blank canvas where the transformations of seasons take place. Elisabeth imagines Daniel “peeling a white orange with a white penknife. The scroll of the peel falls into whiteness like into deep snow and disappears” (39). But right after, in Elisabeth’s imaginations Daniel throws

the colours back on, “he pulls the colours green and blue like a string of handkerchiefs out of the centre of himself. The orange in his hand turns into Cézanne-colours” (39). These colours white blue, green and orange become an imaginative power that resembles nature’s transformative power, which is represented by the season of autumn. The natural colours become art that allows a recreation and re-understanding of the transformative power of seasons. The novel uses the colour white in Elisabeth’s imaginations to reverse the idea of societal values, to imagine the planet after environmental destruction, and as a space of creative transformation.

Following imaginations of the colour white, the novel contrasts examples of the colour green. First, the novel explains how nature supports and creates life, using ‘green’ to symbolize the transformative power of nature. The colour green marks the beginnings of all life. “[T]he earth is made of it. Green. Moss, algae, lichen, mould. It’s the colour everything was before there were flowers, the colour of the first trees, the trees that didn’t have leaves, had needles instead, the trees that grew in the first hiatus between cold and warm...” (101). This description is a typical shift to a ‘deep time’ scene, as in much cli-fi novels. Nature is therefore an artist that adorns plants with green. The green trees were the “original trees”, that “grew even before the world decided to invent all the other colours. It’s the green of the holly that made the red of the berry” (101). The novel notes that there is a bit of green in every season, every beginning, in the base of everything, “green isn’t just a summer colour after all, no, green’s truly a winter colour too” (*Winter*, 2017:101). It is just as nature is the formation of life on Earth. It is omnipresent between cycles of life and seasons. In these examples, the colours of the seasons create transformative imagination that help reconnect humans and the way they perceive life and the environment. Here, nature is represented by the colour green and is a transformative power itself. In the following paragraphs, the characters’ imaginations of plants and images and words are linked to nature to create

new meaning. On the other hand, the novel points out that the colour green is also most often neglected. Here it symbolizes the ecosystem, and it also shows the negligence of humans towards the environment.

[T]he colour green also happens to be one of the easiest colours to erase when people are having their photos taken or film taken of them, because putting an image against a blue or green background will make it easier to cut round them or to blend them later to make it look like they're somewhere they aren't, on a flying carpet, say, or simply floating in space like an astronaut (102).

In the post-production of images, the colour green is also seen as a form of 'white', as green disappears into the background. This use of special effects in photography is similar to the negative symbolism of the colour white in the previous paragraph. Ironically, green does not represent the colour of the planet, it is the colour that when removed, all entities will indeed float like astronauts in the remaining blankness. The novel uses these imaginations of colours of seasons and nature to explore the relationship between humans and the environment, as well as reimagine the way they are seen. Smith points to the importance of discovering the power of transformation through imagination, when language, image, plant, colours, seasons and nature all become like the transformative force that is nature.

After illustrating the imaginations of colours, next I will discuss how art and images are imagined and reinterpreted in the novel. In Amy E. Elkins' interview (2019) with Ali Smith, Smith shares how her partner Sarah Wood, who is a visual artist, inspires her ideas of collage art and notion of archives. In the novel, Smith's character Elisabeth explains to her mother that 'art' is about recreation by explaining how Daniel taught her to visualize collages of images. They imagine the images with their eyes closed and describe their own imagination of the actual pictures. Elisabeth describes to her mother a visual collage of the images that Daniel has described to her. One of these

imaginations of pictures involves colours, plants and Marilyn Monroe, who is “surrounded by roses, and then bright pink and green and grey waves painted all round her” (80). In Elisabeth’s memory, Daniel and her are recreating through visual art: “except that the picture isn’t literally of literal Marilyn, it’s a picture of a picture of her. That’s important to remember” (80). Acknowledging that these imaginations only represent the picture of something instead of the real thing, Elisabeth clarifies for her mother that the world of imagination allows her to change her perception of things, and not the things themselves: “if I was to take a photo of you then paint a picture of the photo, not you. And the roses look a bit like flowery wallpaper rather than roses. But the roses have also come out of the wallpaper and have curled up round [Marilyn’s] collarbone, like they’re embracing her” (81). This way of imagining pictures demonstrates Ali Smith’s use of a ‘symbiotic field’. Similar to the way Smith describes languages that will be discussed later, Smith creates a symbiotic field of the imagination where she takes elements (humans and plants) in the same visual space and imagines them interacting with each other to form a collaborative picture. Smith’s idea is to give each element a space to grow and a unique role to fulfil, such as (the picture of) Marilyn Monroe taking center stage in the picture, and the (wallpaper of) roses expand to become waves of colours ‘embracing’ her instead of simply roses in their original colours. The novel writes that “[a]n image of an image means the image can be seen with new objectivity, with liberation from the original” (226).

In the descriptions of visual art, Smith combines the themes of nature and gender. In *Autumn* Smith features Pauline Boty’s artwork ‘The Only Blonde in the World’ (1963) as the main inspiration for Elisabeth’s perspective of the society. The gallery label under Boty’s artwork in the museum of Tate (2007) writes that Boty’s work is concerned with gender and sexuality, which also recur throughout the novel. In the same vein that the ‘medium of collage’ allows these images to expand and grow within other images,

Elisabeth describes another picture of a woman who is “just any woman and she’s laughing, she’s sort of throwing her arms up in a blue sky” (82). Similar to the picture of Marilyn Monroe, this picture combines women and nature: “behind her at the foot of the picture there are alps, but very small, and a lot of zigzags in colours” (82). In this picture of the anonymous woman, “instead of having a body or clothes, the woman’s insides are made up of pictures, pictures of other things” (82). The images combine with each other and in return, transform one another, as “art like this examines and makes possible a reassessment of the outer appearances of things by transforming them into something other than themselves.” (226). By rethinking how art and images are not simply what they seem to be, but imagining the components in the images to grow into something more, these imaginations help reinterpret our understanding of the societal and environmental realities.

In another scene, Elisabeth rethinks a painting by Pauline Boty, ‘With Love to Jean-Paul Belmondo’, after she reads a piece of news titled “Leave. EU Campaign Consulted TV Hypnotist” (137), and seeing signs on the houses in the village that reads “GO HOME” (137). Thinking about how Brexit is causing the society to disintegrate, she imagines the natural elements (colours and flowers) of Boty’s painting: “a two-dimensional self is crowned with sensual colour, surrounded by orange and green and red” (138). These elements in the painting connect with each other which helps her reconnect these hostile opinions of political separation between people. Using her imagination from art, she combines the themes of pure colours, “straight out of the tube on to the canvas” (138), plants and gender through “notional petals” and “deep genital looking rose formation” (138), and reimagines these elements on the image of Belmondo. She imagines he is not just a man sitting beneath colourful flowers but the colours and plants “press him richly under at the same time as raise him richly up.” (138). Smith does something here with visual art combining gender and nature, as the

novel makes strong connections between art, nature and society. Elisabeth thinks that there's "something about the use of colour as language, the natural use of colour alongside the aesthetic use, the wild joyful brightness painted on the front of that house in a dire time, alongside the action of a painting" (138). This 'dire time' points out that these chaotic times actually call for more artistic creativity. The motif of gender and the way of creating art are presented here as instruments for the type of creative cultural transformation that is needed now, which also finds a natural analogue in plants. In Elisabeth's imagination, she combines the scene of plants growing around the wired fence and the painting by Pauline Boty: "The cow parsley. The painted flowers. Boty's sheer unadulterated reds in the re-image-ing of the image", she asks herself: "Put it together and what have you got?" (139). By regenerating images, the female sex, and plants, the novel transforms the way the characters think about the present complications in Brexit society and environmental destruction.

Following the ideas using ways of regenerating visual art to reimagine plants, the novel presents a similar concept of transforming language to reimagine realities. Kostkowska (2013:105) writes that Smith "expresses a philosophy of ethical use of language and narrative for transformative purposes". Here the novel suggests ways of thinking about language. It compares narrow nationalist fantasies of language with open and multilingual fantasies of language, and leads to fertile fantasies of a vegetal language. In contrast to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, where language is the 'archive' that has disappeared with the loss of support of the environment, in the *Seasonal Quartet*, Smith creates a 'symbiotic field' through language. She demonstrates this concept by allowing language to extend "between species and between members of species" (Polk, 2001:80). As Polk's 'symbiotic body' is rooted in "relationships of alliance, of cooperation, and negotiation", Smith's use of language allows an understanding of "ourselves as a symbiotic field of exchange, a site of relations that extends beyond the

layer of skin, beyond the merely human, and beyond the immediate present” (Polk, 2001:80). Instead of making distinctions between individuals and groups, Smith’s languages combine language and language, people and people.

Autumn uses words from other languages, as a subtle form of multilingualism to create a “symbiotic field”. In the novel, Daniel explains to Elisabeth that the word ‘gymkhana’ (69) “is a wonderful word, a word grown from several languages” (69), whilst Elisabeth argues that “[w]ords don’t get grown...Words aren’t plants” (69). To which Daniel replies, “Words are themselves organisms” (69). They use wordplay to show the interrelatedness of people and things, pointing towards how British culture is deeply linked to European history and culture, and signifying how people should view Brexit. Elisabeth links ‘Organisms’ to ‘Oregano-isms’ whilst Daniel lists another example of ‘Herbal’ and ‘verbal’. Daniel explains his meaning of words being organisms, and that this language is not defined in narrowly nationalist terms: “Language is like poppies... It just takes something to churn the earth round them up, and when it does up come the sleeping words, bright red, fresh, blowing about. Then the seedheads rattle, the seeds fall out. Then there’s even more language waiting to come up” (69). This idea of languages ‘growing’ and having a ‘power of transformation’ is relevant because as languages shape and portray the world, they change the way the environment is perceived. The transformative power of language as demonstrated in Smith’s novels help to counter experiences of solastalgia that characters experience. Despite the changes to their environment, renewing the way these changes are perceived dissolves the emotional estrangement and unfamiliarity.

Language also helps rethink the present time, and how there is a metamorphoses undergoing even in silence. A scene where Daniel throws his watch in the canal explores the concept of capturing ‘time’. Language helps Elisabeth imagine literal ‘time’ being held by the watch, and the movement of the watch flying represents ‘time’ ‘flying’.

This metaphor of ‘time flying’, allows an imagination of a standstill point in time. The novel encourages thinking about the present, and possibilities we can create through our actions. In another example, the transformation of language can be found in the subtlety in paused moments between speech. “It happens when things are becoming more (slight pause before she says it) final. The pauses are a precise language, more a language than actual language is, Elisabeth thinks” (41). In the slight pause between verbal sentences, the message of the sentence is produced in that momentary pause, which is a process of gestation that transforms the meaning of the whole sentence.

Imagining moments of transformation from verbal multilingualism to the nonverbal allows Elisabeth to understand and create communication between things differently. These observations of words lead up to the complex scene where the novel exemplifies how the relationship between nature and humans can be reimagined by the transformative power of language. In the following scene, Elisabeth contemplates the plants beside the fences having a language imperceptible to human ears: “Cow parsley has a language of its own” (131). It is a language that “nobody...knows or notices is being spoken” (131). These forms of imagined languages transform still objects into active ‘organisms’, which connects humans with nonhuman entities. In the scene where Elisabeth notices a fence installed with cameras videotaping ‘trespassers’, she notices that the fence blocks people out from rural common land. Not only is it a fence, but two fences, with “identical chainlink fence topped with the same foully frivolous looking razorwire” (140), and “electric-clipped too” (140). As she has an “experience of the diamond-shaped wirework flashing next to her eyes” (140), she also notices “weed-life reappearing already through the churned-up mud round one of the metal posts” (140). Elisabeth uses poetic language to describe this contrast between nature and the man-made fence: “abandon and presence...calm meets energy / artifice meets natural / electric energy / natural livewire.” (139). Using language to reimagine realities create

hope and strength for Elisabeth, as “[i]t’s the first time she’s felt like herself for quite some time” (139). Between the words “calm” and “energy”, “artifice” and “natural”, “electric energy” and “natural livewire”, Elisabeth imagines that the meeting of these oppositional verbal words creates a tension that is reflected in the silent language of the plants that are growing everywhere around this piece of man-made obstacle. She imagines their language:

The nettles say nothing. The seeds at the tops of the grass stems say nothing. The little white flowers on the tops of their stalks, she doesn’t know what they are but they’re saying their fresh nothing. The buttercups say it merrily. The gorse says it unexpectedly, a bright yellow nothing, smooth and soft and delicate against the mute green nothing of its barbs. (143)

Elisabeth imposes the meaning of her own verbal language onto the silent language that she imagines of the plants. This helps Elisabeth imagine that the resilience of the nettles, seeds, buttercups and gorse represent a gestation of growth, where they are undergoing a process of transformation.

In these examples in the novel, language finds ways to overcome despairing realities (between society and nature, destruction and growth). Both the previous paragraphs demonstrating the imagination of images and this paragraph illustrating the transformation of languages show how the novel deals with imagining conflicting situations under Brexit and climate change. However, the powers of language should be regarded cautiously as well. According to Smith, “[l]anguage is our means of expressing both potential and communication, and also our means of defining ourselves, pinning ourselves and others down, boxing ourselves and others more closely in.” (Jernigan, 2004). This acknowledgement indicates that language could either be strengthening or limiting. These limitations of language will be discussed in the chapter on the second novel, *Winter*.

From the visual collage of art and multilingual understandings of language to the vegetal transformations, I will move on to another form of regeneration that Smith suggests that can be applied to thinking about climate change and Britain's societal crisis, which is through two ways of imagining plants in *Autumn*. In the first example, *Autumn* contrasts the 'cycle of life' of plants with the cycle of life of humans, and uses this rethinking of plants as a transformative power for hope. In these scenes that depict the transformation of the human to the nonhuman, in his sleep Daniel begins a series of hallucinations where he imagines Christine Keeler transforming into a plant. In Daniel's dreams, his own memories combine with fantasies of Keeler, and he finds liberation from his own confined body. In a coma, his mind roams in a stream-of-(un)consciousness and he imagines himself as a pine tree. He feels helplessness as his body fails: "when he reminisces about Christine Keeler, who she is, he crumbles...It falls to the floor. Up go all his pinecones. He groans. She doesn't hear a thing" (91). In the next scene, Christine Keeler becomes a plant:

Daniel in the gallery sees one of her hands, the one on the rail of the witness box, cover itself in little shoots and buds. The buds split open. There are leaves coming out of her fingers...now only her face and her hair are unleafy. Overnight, like a girl in a myth being hunted by a god who's determined to have his way with her, she has altered herself, remade herself so she can't be had by anyone. (96).

As Daphne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* resolves to transform into a plant rather than be taken by another god's erotic desire, Daniel imagines Christine Keeler departing from her human body and morphing into a plant. As she changes, her stubbornness and resilience overcome the limitations of her human body and her surroundings. This scene is a rethinking of the Profumo affair. It combines the idea of regenerating gender with vegetal transformation. The novel turns from this idea of regenerative transformation to thinking about overcoming the fear of old age by contrasting the cycle of life between

humans and plants.

In different circumstances, the novel describes Keeler and Daniel's imaginary transformations from humans to plants. Their transformation into plants liberates them from their predicaments. Keeler is freed from the denunciation of the female sex under traditional masculine perspectives and Daniel overcomes his physical limitation of old age. I will analyze Daniel's scene of vegetal transformation in detail to explain how this example helps rethink the human lifespan, which can be further linked to thinking about liberation from environmental distress due to societal disruption and climate change. After hallucinating about Keeler, Daniel imagines himself transforming into a pine tree. As he is lying in bed in the hospital, in his hallucinations he recalls another scene of himself as a boy on a train. While unconscious, from being "the old man confined in the bed in the tree" (99), Daniel flashes back to becoming the boy in his memories that was on a train travelling through "deep spruce woods" (99), who "is thin and small...but he thinks he's a man" (99). In his sequence of flashbacks, his feeling of "old age" resembles "growth of nature". Daniel's unchronological imaginations distort the time frames of his vantage point. The linkage between the preceding and succeeding memories, and the eclipse of his body and consciousness, are momentary affiliations to nature's resilience. Reaching the end of his trail of thoughts, the young boy on a train in the next instant becomes the old man in a bed once again. This scene jumps back to the present time. The process of this imaginary transformation allows him to experience the life cycle of the pine tree, thereby changing his perspective on life.

Both when he is the boy on the train and the old man in the bed, Daniel's emotions are confined to this 'wooden overcoat' (101). In the next scene, Daniel's mind enters that of the Scots pine, and he experiences the perception of the Scots pine. He imagines he is "shut inside something remarkably like the trunk of a Scots pine...it smells like a pine" (89) but without control of his own body, there is "no real way of telling" (89).

Not unlike his own confinement in his body in the hospital bed in reality, “there’s not much room for movement inside a tree. His mouth and eyes are resined shut” (89). This scene refers to ‘deep time’ thinking in the following description. Daniel imagines he is an ancient and adaptable and noble species, the kind of tree that pre-dates by quite a long way the sorts of trees with leaves; a versatile tree, the Scots pine doesn’t need much soil depth, is remarkably good at long life, a tree that can last for many centuries. (90).

The novel contrasts a patient in old age lying in bed in a care centre, whose time in human years is coming to an end with the life of a Scots pine that pre-dates trees with leaves that can last for centuries. The power of imagination transcends the human perspective of life and time. Daniel no longer sees the reality of his life near the end, his imagination of a tree helps him understand how nature has a power of sustainability. This shift in perspective allows him to overlook age and one point in time, and that beyond ephemeral human years, life in nature and time will continue.

The novel uses the Scots pine to imagine nature’s power of transformation and creativity. Daniel remarks that this kind of tree is “versatile” in colour, and in springtime the pollen is “as yellow as bright paint pigment in an artist’s jar, plentiful, pervasive, scene-stealing like the smoke round a conjuring trick” (90). In his imagination of the body of a tree, “the scent lightens despair...like wearing a coat of armour ...made of a substance through which the years themselves, formative, have run” (90). The novel refers to how nature always adapts in human activities. Daniel imagines the tree as “good for telegraph poles, for the props that pit builders used in the days when industry relied on people working in pits and pits relied on pitprops to hold the ceilings of the tunnels up safely over their heads” (90). He envisions that trees go underground “in the form of something useful” (90), and are cut down to “spend the afterlife as messenger between people across landscapes” (90). In the background of these human activities,

the idea of regeneration is exemplified:

Cut this tree I'm living in down. Hollow its trunk out. Make me all over again,
with what you scooped out of its insides. Slide the new me back inside the old
trunk. Burn me. Burn the tree. Spread the ashes, for luck, where you want next
year's crops to grow. Birth me all over again Burn me and the tree Next summer's
sun Midwinter guarantee. (101).

Daniel's imagination of the tree's monologue resembles a recital of mythical stanzas that form a cycle of nature and life. Despite the hospitalization that pumps him full of drugs, the aftereffects of being held on life support, and experiencing life ebbing away, these imaginary hallucinations nonetheless allow Daniel to feel the natural rhythm of nature and of seasonal life. Facing his fear of old age from the opening of the novel, Daniel thinks that "death's a sorry disappointment" (4), he would "have made sure to [die] at [the age of] twenty, twenty five" (4), so that he could experience "[o]nly the good" (4). However, this imaginary transformation allows Daniel to find liberation from his physical body and accept his place in death.

As the previous paragraphs have shown, the novel uses examples regenerating gender and age to think about facing climate change and societal issues. The theme of gender corresponds to the current societal crisis, where views of gender have been distorted as politicians are taking advantage of masculine authoritarian ideologies whilst denouncing female politicians (mentioned in the novel). Smith also addresses the fear of aging that elderly characters are experiencing. This fear also recurs in other characters in the following novels. Regeneration through imagining the cycle of the Scots pine allow a transformation that offers more to life than one lifetime in one human body. The novel seems to say that time is a cycle, and so is life. This example exemplifies the positive way that being at peace with viewing time from a larger cycle of life points to hope for sustainability of nature. Furthermore, as the Anthropocene has

changed life on the planet, life on Earth also seems to reach a discontinuance. This imagination of regenerative power also suggests nature's power of sustainability to overcome destruction of the Anthropocene.

In a second example of a human-plant transformation in *Autumn*, the novel reflects on the question of human and nonhuman species' coexistence on the planet by re-imagining the relationship between humans and plants. The story views humans from the nonhuman perspective. As Smith's earlier works exemplify a 'microscopic particularity' (Kostkowska, 2013), that give nonhuman species agency and are described in detail, here in *Autumn*, nature is anthropomorphic and an active character. In one scene, Elisabeth recalls a memory of Daniel teaching her to play a game using their imagination. Daniel narrates a tale of a man wearing a costume of a tree, facing a man holding a gun (124). Daniel uses these two characters to represent humans and plants on the planet. He asks Elisabeth whether the best solution to the conflict of interests between the man representing humans (with guns), and the man representing a 'tree' (or nature) is through war (118). He exemplifies how the hatred and enmity that 'the man with a gun' harbours towards 'the man in a tree' would only destroy life on Earth. The man with a gun exemplifies a proud attitude in creating 'civilisation':

Think what it'd be like if everyone started wearing tree costumes, the man with the gun said. It'd be like living in a wood. And we don't live in a wood. This town's been a town since long before I was born... it was good enough for my parents, and my grandparents and my great grandparents. (125)

This passage represents how humans see the planet as their possession, they don't consider the planet to be inhabited by other species nor do they see how this treatment of the environment will cause more destruction in the future. The man resents change and nature overtaking his possession of land. His belief that this was the way humans had always lived also represents the static position that is stopping people from truly

changing their attitudes towards the environment.

In the story, Daniel shows Elisabeth what the world in the Anthropocene is becoming like, as ‘the man with the gun’ acts upon his aggressive possessiveness. Daniel paints a picture of the universe around them full of unseen “shot-dead pantomime characters” (126). Using characters from fairy tales and fables as characters, all of these living subjects are “mown down, a panto corncrop, panto massacre, a comedy tragedy, dead, dead, dead” (126-7), and only the person dressed as a tree is left standing. Destruction results in an environment which no longer supports life, as all the species are extinguished, and all that is left is the torn down ‘tree’. The story continues with the human agent producing chemicals to destroy the last of nature. However, before the perpetrator uses his gun again, “the person dressed as a tree transforms before the gunman’s eyes into a real tree, a giant tree, a magnificent golden ash tree towering high above waving its mesmerizing leaves” (127). The man with the gun in Daniel’s story begins shooting in panic, but discovers that the tree cannot be demolished. In anger and frustration, “he kicks its thick trunk. He decides he’ll go and buy weedkiller to pour on its roots, or matches and petrol, to burn it down” (127). The story ends with the man in the tree costume turning into a real, enormous tree that shines with golden light.

Daniel’s tale raises questions about the human-centric outlook upon life, the inclination to destruction, and difficulty of proper human and nonhuman co-existence. At the same time, this tale hints at the resilience of plants and nature’s power of rebirth. This tale not only emphasizes nature’s transformative power, but also invites us to reconsider a reversal of positions between human and nonhuman species. It urges us to think about nature and change, by showing the result of destruction in nature and the refusal to accept change. This idea can be extended to discussing Smith’s perspective on the society in times of Brexit and climate change. In the environment, nature covers

the landscape and supports life on Earth, as pointed out in these novels, immigrants cover much of the population in Britain. By enforcing an authoritarian control over nature and immigrants, which only allows a selected group of human species (in terms of the environment) and a particular ethnic group (in terms of societal race and ethnicity) to have dictatorship over the environment, the environment will be destroyed, and the consequences are destructive. Smith uses these examples of transformations in the novel to show that the solution to harmonious life on Earth is to change, and that change is inevitable and beautiful.

Finally, *Autumn* emphasizes ways of viewing 'time' as static or as transformative. The central contrast in the novel depicts a metamorphoses of people's attitude towards their realities. The novel indicates that some people pile up objects "in a shop full of junk" (129), holding onto hope that "somewhere among all the thousands and thousands of abandoned, broken, outdated, tarnished, sold-on, long-gone and forgotten things, there is something of much greater worth than anyone realizes" (129). Like Elisabeth's mother's obsession with antiques, they try to maintain their static place and resist change. The novel compares attitudes of dwelling in the past with accepting change in the present. An example of this 'battle of emotions' is a scene where in the midst of Elisabeth and Daniel's conversation, Daniel becomes absorbed in his own thoughts. Elisabeth urges Daniel to move out of past memories and be courageous to face the present:

Mr Gluck, Mr Gluck? [says Elisabeth. Daniel replies:] Ah. Yes. I was, I was – What was I? [Elisabeth reminds him:] You said the words, while we're here ... You said it twice. While we're here. Then you stopped speaking. [Daniel replies:] Did I?... While we're here. Well. While we're here, let's just always hold out hope for the person who says it" (128).

This conversation refers to Hannah's letters to Daniel, which remind him of hope in the

present time. From being momentarily lost in his memories, Daniel resurfaces from his thoughts and faces the present. The importance of changing one's perspective to continue finding hope in the present is repeated throughout the novel, and the examples of regeneration all help to imagine this possibility.

Whilst the novel doesn't give a direct solution to climate change's dangers, it invites us to think about the transformative potential of images, the multilingual conceptions of language, and the regenerative powers of plants. In *Autumn*, imagination of images, language, and plants as regenerative powers like nature transform what is existent in reality to what creative imagination can envision. As words can link the nonhuman with humans, it broadens one's capacity to extend one's understanding of life. The novel explores themes of gender, age and time, as well as briefly mentioning migration (immigration). It regenerates these topics with positivity and a collective perspective that are in line with the examples of language, art, and plants. *Autumn* shadows worrying details of the climate, but the novel presents ways of thinking positively to counter environmental distress. The novel is ultimately, about hope for transformation (through creative imagination) and hope for taking action in the present.

3. Snowflakes: Solstice, Stones and Nature writing in *Winter*

Smith plays with recurring themes but takes a different approach and understanding to them in the second novel. In *Winter*, the topics of climate change, emotions, art, and Brexit return, however, whilst *Autumn* explores language, images, and plants as regenerative transformations, *Winter* focuses on the limitations of language, contrasts different ways of writing about the environment, and uses stones as regenerative inspiration. In this chapter, I will first introduce the plot of the novel. Next, I will discuss

Smith's portrayal of the altered climate, problems of pollution, and how words and language are inadequate to describe the experience of environmental pollution and express these emotions. Then I will move on to contrast different ways of environmental writing (between Charlotte and Art), their examples of political environmentalism on blogs and twitter, and an earlier form of environmentalism on TV (discussing Sophia and Iris). Finally, I will give examples of regeneration that allows characters to overcome their environmental distress through reimagining nature.

The plot of the novel is centred around the family of Sophia and Art. Sophia is estranged from her sister Iris for thirty years. and her son Art has had a fallout with his girlfriend, Charlotte. In her place, Art finds Lux, who is a stranger and non-English immigrant whom he notices on the street, to bring to his mother's Christmas dinner. Lux is a crucial figure, as in these novels a charismatic migrant figure helps to reconcile people's differences and become passionate about the environment. Sophia is a capitalist and businesswoman, who is uninterested in the environmental crisis and is passive towards politics. She has hallucinations of a 'floating head' with whom she imagines conversations with, as if climate change itself is a ghostly head that haunts her. This 'imaginary head' also represents the continued presence of the past in Sophia's life. In contrast to her sister, Iris is an active environmentalist and member of the Greenham Peace camp. Aside from these sisters, the characteristics of Art and Charlotte are also contrasted. Charlotte is depicted as a passionate environmental activist, whilst Art is an online nature blogger who is timid, mild tempered and seemingly oblivious to societal injustice and climate change. Art's blog 'Art in Nature' is a type of 'nature writing' that can be contrasted with the novel *Winter*, which is another type of nature writing (environmental novel) itself. Charlotte is politically active about environmental issues and mocks Art's blog and way of writing about the environment. In the novel, these characters are all overwhelmed by environmental distress while showing different

kinds of anxiety. Art is depressed and self-denoting, whilst Charlotte is angry and frustrated by people's inaction, and Sophia is paranoid and seemingly uninterested about politics and environmental problems. *Winter* depicts a barren cold time, but the extremity of the climate also contrasts with nature's adaptability and resilience. Through discussing political differences and reconciling with loved ones, *Winter* produces hope to resolve environmental distress.

Winter shows a premonition of more severe environmental degradation by portraying extreme temperatures in the new climate, and by rewriting themes from Charles Dickens in a Rachel Carson-like vein. The opening of the novel *Winter* takes the ghostly and dark setting from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), that is shadowed by the presence of a ghost (as Sophia in *Winter* is shadowed by her hallucinations of a ghostly head). However, *Winter* differs from Dickens' Christmas story, pointing out that there is undoubtedly an uncanny sense that something is off. In *Winter*, a scene describes "a classic book about spring... sounded at first like a Christmas story but clearly wasn't one" (123). The story becomes stranger, referring to the environmental distress such as solastalgia that people experience, and that the environment was heavily polluted, as "some weeks before [a white granular powder] had fallen like snow upon the roofs and the lawns, the fields and the streams" (123), which wasn't snow but chemical pollution. Finally, the tale concludes that "no witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves" (123). This exact sentence first appeared in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). *Winter* mirrors *Silent Spring*'s apocalyptic warning, but instead of writing about the diminishing of bird populations and environmental pollution by pesticides, *Winter* describes the seasons becoming unfamiliar and the climate becoming hotter: "it's meant to be winter still, February, but it's so warm, today it's shockingly warm, not just like in spring, more like summer" (25). The novel gives

another more detailed experience of the disrupted environmental time:

a minute ago it was June. Now the weather is September. The crops are high, about to be cut, bright, golden. November? unimaginable. Just a month away. The days are still warm, the air in the shadows sharper. The nights are sooner, chillier, the light a little less each time. Dark at half past seven. Dark at quarter past seven, dark at seven (85).

Sarah Dimick (2018) writes that the impact of climate change on 'environmental time', which is the disruption of a pattern in phenology and seasonal form, is reflected in the experience of the climate in literary works. Here in Smith's *Winter*, the hope for a constant climate and reliable pattern in environmental time has dissolved under climate change's ongoing, incremental alteration of the seasons.

The novel discusses the limitations of language and words to describe this alien experience of climate change. At the beginning of *Winter*, the novel lists a large catalogue of things that are 'dead': "God was dead...A great many things were dead...Some, though, weren't...dead yet" (3). The things that were not dead yet were people and societal problems: 'Life', 'Revolution', 'Racial equality', and 'Hatred'. The ones that were dead, were 'technology' and 'nature' (3). It depicts a setting of despair with ongoing problems. In the novel, after a fight between Charlotte and Art, Charlotte destroys Art's computer out of hatred for his indifference to the ongoing crisis in the world. Charlotte's destruction of Art's computer means the end for Art's 'nature blogging'. He is forced to face his personal fears, as well as problems in the society and environment. Art searches online for things that could be added to his list of things that are 'dead', which also correspond to the novel's description of this 'new' climate of winter. His results are 'politics', which is confirmed 'dead', 'Soul', which is 'dying', and Laptop, which he relates back to his current predicament, as "definitely dead". The essence of this new winter is mostly of things 'dead', and it is severely 'harsh'.

Next, I will discuss an example of how language is shown as inadequate to convey environmental emotions. The sections focalized through Sophia are in the time of earlier environmental movements. The novel shows how the average commoner had been incapable of understanding or reacting to the impacts of climate change. The language people know seem to be inadequate to express their emotions upon hearing about the realities related to climate change disasters, and they cannot find ways to comprehend these impacts. In a scene where Sophia recalls a memory of being with Iris and her group of environmentalist friends, they talk about a factory leak in Italy. First, Sophia hears that a farmer's cat died in the field, and its tail had fallen off. It sounded like a joke to her, and she burst out in inappropriate laughter, because she does not know how to comprehend this or express her emotions. In the story,

a valve had blown in a factory near this farm, and the chemicals the factory was making had leaked out in a cloud, and because the area was a place known for its furniture-making the disaster was still happening all these months later because nobody in the world now wanted to buy any furniture made in that place in case the woo was poisonous. Nobody there had even really known there was a leak. (118).

This is an example of Rob Nixon's slow violence, which shows its impact gradually. Eventually the pollution to the environment forced the villagers to move away, but the damage to the ecology was irreversible. This local example of environmental damage destabilizes people's conventional sense of the seasons too, as "all the leaves had fallen off the place's trees, dead like winter though it was July, and its birds had fallen dead out of the sky, and cats and rabbits and other small creatures had keeled over dead" (119). After the factory leak, the faces of local villagers' children were "breaking out in rashes and boils", and local produce became inedible, farmstock was destroyed, and childbirth was officially discouraged by authorities (119).

The novel describes that this story of environmental pollution is shocking and

indescribable. When the group of people passed around photographs of dead animals from the polluted village, Sophia first thought the animals seemed peaceful in the photographs, but later she realizes that they were dead. This feels surreal to her, and she doesn't know how to react, nor does she have the right vocabulary to express herself. From her surroundings, she sees letters that "looked like a nonsense Scrabble game" (119) painted around the room, "isopropylmethylphosphofluoridatewithdeath" (119), which further refers to the long term environmental pollution caused by toxic chemicals that Carson and Nixon discuss. As the previous chapter on *Autumn* has explored the ways of imagining languages, here the novel *Winter* uses a similar imagination of language to reconnect with realities. Sophia realized that the big chunk of letters is "actually words, or almost words... I. So. Prop. Me. Meth. Ethyl...And that was almost the word fluoride....with, and death" (119). This chunk of letters forms an impression of an actual word that seems to be grouped with chemical terms like 'meth', 'ethyl', 'fluoride' and 'death' that she cannot fully make sense of, but leads to a disquieting proximity of 'I', 'me' and these chemical words. The story of the factory leak and the larger problem of climate change (affecting seasons and animals) strike her as incomprehensible and full of lethal components. The novel's depiction of Sophia's confusion and emotional distress can be compared to the environmental distress portrayed in eco-artist Jenny Brown's video, *'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Symbiocene'* (2016). It features a woman who cannot find any language to express her experience of solastalgia, who is desperately asking for help in multiple languages (Finegan, 2016). In both cases, language is depicted as inadequate to come to terms with climate change (in this case, a direct example of environmental pollution). In contrast to the first novel *Autumn*, whereas language is a way of transforming imaginations and creating links to understand nature and society, *Winter* points out the inadequacy of expressing with language.

In the following paragraphs I will explore ways the novel discusses different ways of environmental writing and differences in political views, by contrasting the characters Art and Charlotte. First, the novel depicts different views of environmental writing. The novel compares Art's 'nature blog' to Charlotte's politically active way of viewing environmental issues. The novel depicts Art as a character whose words cannot be taken seriously, as he proclaims, "I'm just not a politico...What I do is by its nature not political. Politics is transitory. What I do is the opposite of transitory." (58). However, the real implication here is that one cannot be an environmental writer without also being a political writer. Art assumes that nature is something like the "structures of hedgerows", as he watches the "progress of the year in the fields", to him, "hedgerows are, well, they're hedgerows. They just aren't political" (58). Charlotte attitude reveals to us that the opposite of Art's belief is true. The novel mocks Art's way of approaching 'nature', as he writes carefully selected posts about 'nature' but does not acknowledge climate change and ongoing environmental issues.

In contrast, Charlotte is concerned about the societal disintegration under Brexit, and she dreams about "a quartered kingdom" that "embod[ies] the terrible divisions in [the] country" (55). At the same time, she argues that the societal problems and the environmental issues are interrelated. She is angry due to the fact that the actions of people in power seemed irresponsible towards the both society and the ecology. They are causing more environmental pollution with their promotion of "plastic carrier bags" that are "unhistoried", and "inhuman" because the material is "damaging to the environment for years and years after they've outgrown their use" (56), which will be "[d]amage for generations" (56). Her anger is also targeted at Art, because of his passive attitude towards the society and towards the ecological destruction around them. She says that his "default to selfishness" (55) is also related to "political selfishness" (55). Charlotte tries to make Art care about "the world's threatened resources" (59), topics

such as the “Water wars”, the ice melting in Antarctica, the plastic in the sea and now in the seabirds, and “in the innards of nearly every single fish or aquatic creature” (59). She points out the connection between the ecology and the political environment, remarking that “literal climate change” has become “a whole seasonal shift” (57). Charlotte sees that the political environment is creating a false illusion of shock and chaos in order to create distraction “to make the stock markets volatile” and “make the currencies jumpy” (57). From Charlotte’s perspective, the problems of the environment which have impacted the economy have thereby triggered the irrational responses of people. What is making the situation worse is the fact that more political leaders are playing with this notion of fear in people and creating more false illusions in the stock market that direct people’s attention away. It points to how climate change and political issues under Brexit are all interrelated and require the public’s immediate attention.

Second, the novel uses an example to exemplify two different ways of nature writing. Charlotte and Art disagree on how the snow condition should be discussed. In the novel, Art had been collecting words that he would use to describe this “snow condition”. His idea of being politically and environmentally active is by talking about “natural unity in seeming disunity” (53), something like the phenomenon that can be observed when “the random grace of snow’s relationship with wind direction” can reveal unity, as “snow lands...in one direction...[and] a tree’s branches go in so many” (53). These comments on nature seem sentimental and conventional because they do not pay attention to the actual change in the climate and how the word ‘snow’ now has several implications. As Charlotte points out, “the word snowflake now had a whole new meaning and he should be writing about that” (53). The term ‘snowflakes’ had been used negatively to describe the younger generation as “being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than previous generations”, according to the Collins dictionary. The term ‘Snowflakes’ is now being used as an insult targeted at opposing

political parties (the right calls the left, and vice versa), and the older generation is still saying the younger generation is a ‘snowflake generation’ (Nicholson, 2016). Meanwhile, the younger generation is taking offense by this label. Meteorologist Jim Dale says that ‘snowflakes’ are lightweight on their own, but collectively, snowflakes can make for a blizzard that will raise attention, which makes the term ‘snowflake’ an effective analogy (Nicholson, 2016). The word ‘snowflake’ is now a contested word which concern environmental and political activists, as well as cause tension between the young and old generations. The novel illustrates Art and Charlotte’s different views on ‘snow’ to show how the dynamics of the political society and environmental issues should be discussed together.

Extending the argument on political nature writing, the novel also links distress from ‘doomscrolling’ to climate change. Both the novels *Autumn* and *Winter* mention twitter messages. In the previous novel *Autumn*, Elisabeth had also been overwhelmed by pressure that she feels from news and twitter comments on the internet. This is described by the term ‘doomscrolling’ (Merriam-Webster), referring to people scrolling compulsively through their phones in times of anxiety. She tries to break free of those influences, and instead, thinks about how language can regenerate her imagination. A similar situation is depicted in *Winter*. Charlotte impersonates Art on his blog, sending fake tweets with obvious spelling mistakes to anger his blog followers. The notion of ‘fake tweets’ refers to the US president Trump’s campaign spreading unverified information and causing distrust amongst people. Using Art’s account, Charlotte sends fake posts of online pictures on twitter, writing that “[i]t isn’t snowing. It’s 11 degrees and sunny” or writing “3 months early the first sieg hting of brimstone!” (49). The followers of Art’s blog are outraged and respond furiously, “for not knowing the difference between a new butterfly and a wakened hibernator” (49). These fake posts about “snowstorms” and the “wakened hibernator” under a “warm winter” also point

to disruptions in environmental time under climate change. Due to the warm winter, the snowstorm and the new butterfly are not sightings at this time of the month anymore. However, under climate change and political upheaval, Art focuses on the same aspects in nature, as he would as if climate change and Brexit doesn't exist or didn't change anything. He simply notes down in his notebook and collect until the 'perfect timing' to post them. His blog is oblivious to disrupted environmental rhythms although ironically he tries to show the accuracy of his knowledge in 'nature' observations and his artistic creativity for language and puns to present them. All of these actions produce more emotional distress in the novel, as Charlotte in the novel tries to point out that 'doomscrolling' and climate change are also interrelated.

Third, the novel shows how both Art and Charlotte are suffering from environmental distress. Here in *Winter*, Art is hiding behind the profile of his blog account to maintain the role of a conventional 'nature writer', his identity is established by his posts and his followers' responses. Art is distressed from his divided identities, one on the internet and another in the real world. At the same time, the novel questions the way the internet has taken over interactions in person and how identities are created online. Art becomes distressed by his confusion over his identity in the cyber world and the library where he is at in reality, "[s]o which is the real thing? Is this library not the world? Is that the world, the one on the screen, and ... sitting here bodily with all these other people round him isn't?" (51). His identity is destabilized when Charlotte impersonates his online account. In *Winter*, Smith uses the Shakespearean theme of characters exchanging identities first by Charlotte's impersonation of Art on his blog, and again when Art finds Lux to act as his girlfriend (Charlotte) to go with him to his mother's party. At the same time, this theme of switching identities symbolizes the different ways of environmental writing, and even the way Smith herself is writing these climate novels.

Art's confusion over identities (as an online blogger and as a nature writer) is connected to his environmental distress. He becomes stuck in these roles and cannot find the cure for his anxiety. With distress that comes from cyber pressure, he becomes full of doubt for himself and "the world-understanders in their row of tiny online squares" (49), he

feels a terrible sadness at his core. Can natures change? Because his is feckless.

He is a selfish fraud. Things never go so wrong, do they, in real nature writers' lives, that they can't solve it or salve it by writing about nature? And look at him...He's not the real thing. (49).

Firstly, this passage points out that this type of writing only about nature itself is an anthropocentric way of instrumentalizing the environment. Nature writers are labelled with the assumption that 'politically aware nature writers' were "habitually self-satisfied... self-blinding and comforting themselves about their own identities in troubling times" (53). Secondly, this passage signifies that simply turning to nature is no longer a remedy for emotional distress as in earlier forms of literature. In another example, Art denies the importance of seasonal change, telling Charlotte that, "[he'd] love to chat all day about the seasons but [he has] work to do" (57), which was to write his blog about 'solstice'. Charlotte views the idea of 'solstice' as describing the present crisis. It is the "darkest days ever. There's never been a time like this" under Brexit and climate change in British history. Art ignores these political issues and points out "the solstices are cyclic and they happen every year" (57). *Winter* points out that this understanding of natural rhythms and cycles can be dangerous, because it could lead people to overlook pressing political issues in the present.

Charlotte is also suffering from environmental distress. Her emotions also represent the 'war of emotions' that people facing climate change are experiencing. Art thinks about "her passionateness, her passion for all sorts of things. Her taking the world

so personally. Her endless hurt and fury at the world's sadnesses, like they're personal, personally meant, personal affronts. Her endless feeling. Her endless feeling for everything" (76). Charlotte suffers from eco-anxiety and eco-angst, because she still has hope and compassion for the society even when the majority of the population seem to be conflicting her beliefs, as the society generated by capitalism is headed towards more materialism and creating more pollution. The novel points to how these problems are fueled by people focusing on gaining economical profit, whilst diminishing the importance of sincerity and emotions in the society. Although Charlotte's actions are seemingly destructive, as expresses her negative emotions by criticizing Art, hacking into his social media account, and destroying his laptop, her emotions and active political activities are in fact headed towards Glenn Albrecht's idea of a 'Generation Symbiocene'.

After contrasting different ways of environmental writing between Art and Charlotte, next, I will discuss different political views by contrasting Iris and Sophia. Aside from blogs and twitter in the present time, *Winter* uses news and TV to discuss earlier forms of active environmentalism. Art's aunt Iris is an environmental activist who had been advocating for greater awareness of pesticides, warning people of the harm of chemicals (128) on TV, back when she was younger. Her protests on environmental destruction refer to the groups of activists in the early 1970s environmental movements. In the novel, Iris acts as a precursor of environmental ideas. First, she emphasizes the severe consequences of poisoning the environment: "crop spraying. Relation of pesticides to nerve gas. Relation of nerve gas to Nazis" (128). This again points to the structural connection between ecological and political problems. Second, in response to news of pollution elsewhere, she tells her family that they should care, because "Everywhere's a here" (139). She points out the regional and the global dimensions of climate change impacts, and raise questions about how people should

view their role and responsibility. This idea resonates with the concept of ‘eco-cosmopolitanism’ that Ursula Heise (2008) discusses, which emphasizes the importance of both ‘place’ and ‘planet’ on a global scale. In the novel, at the time when Iris had been active on TV, the public did not give attention to the distanced and gradual impacts of climate change on nonhuman species.

Sophia thinks about the contrast between the present time and back in the 1970s when people failed to see the consequences they would be facing in the future. In the past, things were not yet so severe. Sophia recalls a distant memory of seeing Iris on TV:

The interviewer shows Iris and then the background sunny like it’ll never not be sunny again... and the people next door are having a barbecue in their garden, their children squealing with happiness and jumping in an out of paddling pool. ... an expert in the studio tells the newsreader that everything that Iris said is laughable and untrue. (129)

In the novel, only decades later to Iris’ protests on TV, as the environment rapidly continues to deteriorate and the numbers of climate protests grow (143), these environmental issues and political urgency have become more widespread knowledge to the public.

The perspectives on politics and the environment of Iris and Sophia are completely opposite of each other. Whilst Iris is an environmental activist, Sophia is passive about politics and climate change. Similar to Art who separates nature from the society, Sophia’s ideas of politics are removed from environmental issues. As Pittel (2018) notes, Smith’s idea of politics and art continually point out the need to combine human living with nature, instead of considering politics, art, or nature as separate concepts. Smith combines these characters with dubious positions in *Winter* to exemplify this message. Charlotte and Iris point out the problem of politicians making bad choices for

the environment and for the society. They point out how people living in the world are all connected and will be influenced by these choices, such as environmental destruction due to pollution, and that everyone shares the resources of the planet (such as water, referring to the 'Water wars' she argues about earlier).

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss Sophia's environmental distress and the regenerative transformation through imagining stories that the novel uses to treat this distress. In the beginning of the novel, Sophia and Art both feel extreme stress and appear to be schizophrenic. Art is anxious about the reputation of his blog and his twitter responses. By focusing on writing natural phenomena, he hides away from the reality. His mother Sophia is stressed about not being able to catch up with the changes in the world. She feels like an outsider living at the periphery of society. When she goes to places like the optician's, the bank, and even amongst Iris' friends, she feels ignored and unimportant. As a result, Sophia keeps to herself and does not care about the ecological crisis or the political situation happening right now in the UK. Both Art and Sophia are distanced from their surroundings. They constantly have episodes of flashbacks which they compare with reflections on the present.

In one example, Sophia thinks about the time before her separation with her sister Iris. In the present time on Christmas day, she recalls how the times have changed:

why does it mean so much and at the same time so little? She wants it to mean again like meaning used to mean. And why [Christmas Day] is a day that had a meaning before but while it carries on having that meaning, meaning so much to so many people, why can't it have that meaning any more here and now for her? The very notion of the name of a day of the week having to have a meaning makes her feel tired at a level she's never known tiredness could go to... There is a new meanness in meaning. (126)

The novel combines personal issues of the characters with the broader environmental

problems. Sophia cannot keep up with how the times have changed, referring to political changes in the society, and her personal loneliness after Iris has left home. Over the years, their ideas of life and politics have developed into different perspectives. Sophia lives in her own secluded world and disregards the world events. She always switches the TV to another channel whenever she sees Iris protesting about the environment on screen. She cannot feel how these events are related to herself and has become numb to political and environmental issues. The novel explores how her personal memories of herself and Iris are connected the on-goings of the society and the environment at the back of her mind, but as she cannot find a way to deal with them, these memories cause more environmental distress.

Similar to *Autumn*'s venture in transformative imagination, hope in *Winter* is discovered through 'stones'. The novel features the artist Barbara Hepworth, who works with sculptures made of stones. Her 'sculptural forms' are made with stones, and seem to refer to Sophia's imaginary disembodied 'head of a child'. First, Sophia imagines interactions with the imaginary head. In repeated scenes of the clock tower chiming at midnight, the urgency of "the head that was too heavy too solid" (140) being in danger (as it seems to become more transparent) gradually dawns upon her. Sophia helplessly faces the 'imaginary head', and feels that "the nothing it did was intimate. She didn't want it to grow cold" (141). She begins to think of ways to take care of it. These imaginations regenerate emotions and compassion in Sophia's heart for the environment and her family members. Her imagination of the 'imaginary head' allows her to view the environmental loss as a personal loss. The 'head' as well as the environment becomes something she cares for but cannot revive on her own.

In another scene of her hallucinations, she imagines an uninvited man entering her house, who shows her photographs of people physically injured by chemical pollutions. This scene exposes her underlying awareness to the crisis in the world happening right

around her. The novel does not point to a direct way to respond to the environmental crisis or these environment-induced anxieties, but lets the uninvited man from Sophia's imagination ask, "into whose myth do we choose to buy?" (134). This refers to the idea that disbelief or passive reactions to climate change and irrational responses to political situations are manipulated by the media surrounding us.

These imaginary dialogues encourage Sophia to reflect upon herself, and she changes her attitude towards violence and injustice around her. The "[r]efugees in the sea. Children in ambulances. Blood-soaked men running to hospitals...Dust-covered dead people lay by the sides of roads. Atrocities. People beaten up and tortured in cells" (29) used to seem to her as "ordinary everyday terribleness" that she feels "nothing" (29) about. After she becomes inspired by the 'head' (that seems like a 'stone'), these feelings towards the environment turn into a feeling of being wounded that surprises herself (29). As Sophia comes to think about the environment, "she sat at her table on Christmas Eve and felt pain play through her like a fine-tuned many-stringed music and her the instrument" (30). It is an intimate experience for her, as she thinks about "how could losing so much of a self not hurt?" (30). She begins to think about what she has to offer, "[p]oor as [she is]" (30). Later in the novel, her attitude and perspectives have changed when she tries to take action and think of ways to protect the 'imaginary head' and the environment.

In *Winter*, Sophia takes inspiration from a stone (and the imaginary head), whilst Art is inspired by a handful of 'soil'. These stones and soil help them to imagine that they are reconnected to nature. This transformation allows them to understand how environmental problems affect them. Comparable to *Autumn's* language of plants, in *Winter*, Sophia contemplates the stone. She imagines that "[t]he nothing [the stone] did was intimate" (141). The feelings that the stone give her help her to express the emotions that she could not do with language. She imagines that the stone transmits the

meaning that the word ‘relief’ had lost (142). This imaginative process can be compared to the previous chapter that discusses the imaginative way of finding meaning in language. As plants in *Autumn* had communicated meaning through their silence, the stone here also speaks to Sophia. As Sophia sees her reality as being too incomprehensible that she cannot catch up, contemplating the stone makes her realize how uncomplicated it can be to feel about something. Subsequently, it inspires her to imagine her reality differently and Sophia begins to care about things other than her own distress.

Next, I will discuss the regenerative transformation of imagining ‘soil’. *Winter* depicts nature’s cycle of hibernation and rebirth as a way of finding hope. It promises the continuity of the next season and the possibility of hope. This cycle of nature inspires characters to look for hope under pressure in a difficult environment, “that’s what winter is: an exercise in remembering how to still yourself then how to come pliantly back to life again. It is an exercise in adapting yourself to whatever frozen or molten state it brings you” (66). The novel acknowledges that for hope to sprout, it has to go through a time of deep gestation. In a scene that Art contemplates a handful of earth, he thinks that ‘earth’ “is dying...divided...doomed...destroyed...dead” (65). It refers to the seasonal “death” of crops (which are the mottoes of the first novel, *Autumn*), and life on Earth during the season of winter.

The novel discusses the seasons in conventional terms of the seasons’ cultural meanings and innovates how they can be understood. Whilst discussing how plants return to cycles of life in *Autumn*, *Winter* imagines a time of rest and peace through reimagining ‘soil’ (earth) and ‘stone’. These elements of the Earth are not ‘alive’ as plants in *Autumn*, but accompany the season of winter to the ‘darkest times’. The novel describes how stones and soil endure the complete ‘death’ of nature, and are the much needed elements to give birth to a new cycle. Art holds the soil and think,

a handful of [soil] breathing at its own rate, slow and meditative and completely itself through all the anger and the rot, earth itself, to remind him of it stalling to hard and frozen when the temperatures fall and thawing back to pliant again when they rise. Life arises again and begins its search of place in the cold and dry times of winter (66).

As a 'nature blogger', Art controls the perfect moments of spectacles in nature in his posts. However, here he notices things are beyond his control and he follows nature's guidance for inspiration. This regenerative imagination of the seasons changes his perspective of the reality.

From feeling inauthentic and powerless, Art becomes inspired by nature's power of rebirth, "gentle art will look for literal earth" (66). Referring to both art (and the transformations of art in *Autumn*) and Art the character, 'Art' looks for "city earth", he writes as a part of his blog that, "in places where the city trees meet the pavement; sometimes there are patches of earth round them if they haven't been rubbered-in under that bouncy plastic-stuff" (66). Just Elisabeth does in *Autumn*, Art notices nature thriving amongst man-made things. He realizes that as humans and nature are living together in urban space, it is a space where nature and human constructions find a way to coexist.

In the same vein, Layng also writes in, 'Seasonal Discourse in the works of Hal Borland' (2019), that when people engage in observations of nature and seasons, "[they] become more patient and humble...[and] must cooperate with nature rather than control it" (2019:627). This idea corresponds to the way the novel encourages thinking about nature and human life. By reflecting that "nature is adaptable. Nature changes all the time" (66), Art begins to rethink about his realities, reconstructs his understanding of his identity, as well as his place in the environment. He also becomes humble, and doesn't focus on proving himself correct by showing his knowledge of nature anymore.

Although the novel *Winter* is critical towards purely ‘nature writing’ blogs and shows that ‘nature writing’ that fails to bridge or discuss the connection between humans and nature is questionable. Nevertheless, descriptions of spectacular natural phenomena can play a productive role too, when they remind humans of hope and beauty in nature under times of darkness and despair.

To sum up the discussions in this chapter, *Winter* depicts the limitations of language, different ways of writing about nature, and about regeneration through imagining elements (stones and soil) in nature. The novel discusses the theme of language, but contrary to the positive transformations they create through imagination in the previous novel *Autumn*, language could become ‘labels’ or as Smith says, what boxes ourselves and others in. The novel exemplifies with comments on twitter, posts on blogs, ‘scrabble’ letters, and words from search engines, how these words limit the imagination and fail to make sense of the ecological and political disturbances in the world. *Winter* contrasts the passive characters Art and Sophia with the political activists Iris and Charlotte. Art and Sophia are not ignorant of the impacts of climate change and Brexit, but only focus on their private lives. However, environmental distress influences everyone, as they live in extreme anxiety and fear. Art’s nature blog had also been questionable and anthropocentric, but the novel shows that these ways of thinking can change through regenerative imagination. *Winter* uses earth, soil, stones (as well as the ‘imaginary head’ that resembles a stone) to rejuvenate hope for nature’s rebirth, and hope for people in these confusing times. The novel points to the same ideas concluded in *Autumn*, which are about proper co-existence between humans (urban society) and nature, and to take action towards environmental and social problems.

4. Mountains: Postcards, Immigration, and Borders in *Spring*

This chapter will analyse *Spring* (2019), which discusses the same topics - Brexit, climate change, immigrants and the regenerative potential of art and nature. In terms of plot, the novel *Spring* presents the narrative in two parts. In the first part, the storyline centers on the characters Richard and Paddy. This part features Ali Smith's typical themes of life, love, art, and literature. In the second part, the storyline shifts to discussing the characters Brittany and Florence. Here, the novel reveals immigration themes (depicting the SA4A) and problems of racism in the society. Later in the novel, these two story plots will merge, as the characters meet in Scotland. First I will discuss the first part of the novel that portrays personal grief and ecological grief. Next I will discuss regeneration through imaginary conversations with lost loved ones, through the motif of mountains, and how imagination and narrative strategy help rethink environmental distress and the present reality. Then I will move on to discuss the topic of immigration and borders, and how Smith uses the immigrant character as inspiration in the narrative. I will analyse an example included in the novel (which is a story about spring) to rethink the seasons and the society as a whole. To conclude this chapter, I will analyze a passage in *Spring* that strings together the imagery of nature that has recurred throughout the three novels.

The first part of the novel discusses personal and ecological losses by focusing on the relationship between Richard and Paddy. The narrative time in the novel is unchronological. At the opening of the novel, Paddy has passed away, and the narrative is told by flashbacks of episodes from Richard's past. In *Spring*, Richard Lease is a TV filmmaker who preemptively mourns the death of his best friend Paddy, months before she actually dies of cancer. She is his scriptwriter and also the woman he has loved and revered for years. Richard receives the first invitation in four years from a new

scriptwriter, Martin Terp, to work on a project about an imaginary relationship between the canonical, real life authors Katherine Mansfield and Rainer Maria Rilke. Richard is intrigued by the project but he disapproves of the superficiality of the script. He would like to rethink the way this story would have played out but his suggestions are rejected.

Spring begins at a similar starting point to the previous books, as the protagonist is depressed and almost suicidal. The novel begins with Paddy's passing away, and Richard is about to give up on life and hope as he stands before the platform at the train station.

He breathes in. It hurts. He breathes out. It hurts. The next time a train comes through this station and stops here, he will slip down in the gap between it and the platform, place himself across these clean well-kept tracks next to the wheels and let the carriage he's got himself under put an end to him by the weight of its unstoppable going-forward. (56).

In this passage, the train is a symbol of fast paced industrial progress and modernity. Paddy's passing away is a blow to Richard's face. The change of scriptwriters working with Richard and the way the new film project is written to entertain the audience in the style of a fast-food romance, are wake-up calls to the new times and modernity. Richard recalls a memory where Paddy once said that she was a "dying species, [she's] that thing nobody out there thinks is relevant anymore. Books. Knowledge. Years of reading." (39). The new scriptwriter was just the opposite. Their differences also symbolize how Richard cannot keep up with the times, the changes in society after Brexit and the interrelated impacts of climate change. The novel first compares the loss of seasonality with Richard's grief over the loss of Paddy,

it'll be like the house is stuck in winter light for nearly a decade no matter the actual season. Now? He is a man at a station waiting for his last train. The seasons are meaningless. No – worse than meaningless. Paddy is rubble, and time just

keeps on going. Autumn, then there'll be winter. Then there'll be spring, and so on. (109).

As Richard is preoccupied with the physical loss of his best friend Paddy, the repetition of the seasons under climate change seems hopeless. The two scales of human emotions and environmental distress are presented together here. In Zadie Smith's article (2014) "Elegy for a country's seasons", the loss of seasonality reminds us of the loss of treasured memories. In *Spring*, the sequence is reversed. The novel compares Richard's predicament with the loss of a 'gentle' spring.

Last April. The last April. Four months before she will die. Though nobody knows that yet for sure, obviously. What everybody knows today is that it's the hottest April day there's been since the year Richard was born. (65).

Richard's anticipation of Paddy's death reveals his personal grief, but at the same time the novel implies the anticipation of climate change. The novel shows an incremental impact and growing awareness of climate change and the anxiety this process causes. It is the 'last April' because Richard's beloved friend Paddy will no longer be around come next spring. The novel also implies non-seasons under the hot climate will become the new normal of seasonal cycles under climate change, as the temperature in April has never risen to such a degree before.

However, both Paddy and Richard hold onto hope by thinking about nature. In a scene from Richard's memory before Paddy has passed away, "[s]he clenches a fist on the table. The simple flowers of our spring are what I want to see again, [Paddy] says." (45). Paddy has a vigor in her and she longs to witness change in the environment and to be a part of this change. Whereas in *Autumn*, plants are a source of inspiration in the present for Elisabeth to take action, the plants that Paddy dreams of are faraway. The season of spring has yet to come and winter seems overdue. In *Spring*, Richard finds hope through his memories of Paddy and the way she views nature. Through Richard

and Paddy's relationship, Richard reimagines and reconstructs his understanding of grief for the climate and his personal loss when he encounters mountains, which will be discussed later.

The re-imagination of art is once again the inspiration for characters in Smith's novels to regenerate hope. Similar to the previous novels, *Spring* features a female artist from the 20th century. In *Autumn*, Elisabeth recovers Pauline Boty's painting 'The only Blonde in the World' (1963). Her representation of Marilyn Monroe, colours, and roses helps her imagine how plants are embracing the woman in the painting. As the roses become a symbol of revitalization of gender, and of hope in the face of environmental destruction, she overcomes psychologically the fence installed by the SA4A. *Spring* features the artworks of mountains by Tacita Dean. In *Spring*, Richard recalls Paddy encouraging him to 'take' his child to see theatre shows, films, go on holiday or see an art exhibition (74). However, since his wife divorced him and moved away with his daughter many years ago, he is estranged with his daughter. Smith uses her typical strategy of using her characters' 'imagination' to connect with people that have passed away or are not physically present. The memories of these loved ones provide emotional resources for a regenerative outlook, that help characters to be hopeful in the present time. In *Autumn*, Daniel remembers letters and poems of his sister Hannah. In *Winter*, Sophia interacts with the imaginary head, and in *Spring*, Richard has imaginary conversations with his estranged daughter as Paddy suggested. Paddy says, "Use your imagination. Take her to see things. Believe me your child will be imagining you too wherever she is in the world. So meet each other imaginatively." (74).

Also with the passing of Paddy, Richard continues to imagine conversations about life and art with her. Their discussions of art become inspiration and a power of transformation in the novel. Smith uses the imagination of characters to regenerate hope and transform how they perceive the reality. And once again, nature is crucial here. In

Richard's imaginary conversation with Paddy, he says

You're missing nothing, Pad. One of the worst springs I can remember. Snow up to here just two weeks ago. Minus seven. And now this. Twenty nine degrees. You're wrong, [Paddy] says. One of the loveliest springs I've known. Plants couldn't wait to get going. All that cold. All this green. (72).

Richard turns from a pessimistic point of view to being influenced by Paddy's optimistic imaginary response. As this excerpt demonstrates, the motif of plants that first appeared in *Autumn* returns again in *Spring*. Here, plants are ready to be reborn and bring forth the season of spring. And Paddy reminds him that it's not about how cold or how harsh the climate has become, but to see the life that is about to begin, even if it is happening at an unusual moment. Despite the climate, it is still "one of the loveliest springs", a spring that is more beautiful precisely because people now have a new awareness of its vulnerability and transience. As both Paddy and his daughter are lost to him, Richard relies on this ability of imagination to go on with life.

Again when Richard follows Paddy's advice to go to exhibitions, the novels shows how imagination and inspiration through art can transform characters and the way they think about reality. In the novel, Richard remembers Paddy once mentioning how the artist Tacita Dean collects photographs from different places and republishes them. The novel describes photographs of random people that did not seem to "merit a photograph", such as "a woman in winter clothes collapsing in hilarity against a wall in the snow." (76). However, Dean's way of reexamining and representing these 'lost' photographs

made something almost magical happen to them. Whatever they'd meant to the people in them or the people who took them had disappeared. Freed from their old personal meanings, it was not just that they could be seen for themselves, but like they'd become ways to let someone looking at them see how the world really

appears. (76).

This idea of reimagining images and realities is similar to the way Daniel taught Elisabeth to reimagine literal collages of art in *Autumn*. It hints at the magical, creative and valuable dimensions of the ordinary. Paddy encourages Richard to do the same. Later, Richard goes to Tacita Dean's exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, where he sees her artworks of mountains. These artworks and the sight of mountains transform the way Richard sees his reality, as we will see.

First, mountains are a recurring motif in the novel, as plants had been in *Autumn*. In the scenes at the beginning of the novel, Richard feels insignificant and replaceable in the presence of powerful mountains whilst being surrounded by nature. He feels intimidated by the mountains, because the pressures in his life and disruption in the current society seem to crush his spirit. Standing beneath the mountain, he thinks, "Oh nothing nothing nothing. The mountains rise like stilled waves above the man at the station and the houses of the town" (56). The climate and landscape that he encounters on his pilgrimage up in the north in the Scottish Highlands are likewise intimidating, 'the thaws', the 'thin-looking streams' that only "seem like nothing, ... can get very big and powerful", and come April and May, "the wind... pulls bushes and little trees up by the roots and flings them at [people]" (54). This setting contrasts the power of Nature with the vulnerability of humans. It depicts Richard's loneliness, the loss of his inspirational muse and work partner Paddy, the rejection of Richard's brilliant idea by the new scriptwriter, and the unfamiliarity of the new climate.

The motif of the mountain in the novel is also linked back to the current societal crisis of Brexit in the UK, inspired by the mountain setting of Richard's new project on Katherine Mansfield and Rainer Maria Rilke. Paddy explains to Richard how this new project that was based on a fictional story set in Switzerland could come to mean more than just two people meeting and falling in love. Paddy says that the scriptwriter should

take in the historical background, as well as extend the imagery of mountains in the project, that “behind it all... [it is] [e]verything that a mountain can mean.” (42). As with the way the other novels *Autumn* and *Winter* use creativity through art or blogging, Richard’s project could become meaningful by representing the similarities between historical Switzerland and the present society under Brexit. Paddy urges Richard to think about the Swiss village where the two authors resided temporarily. She imagines the foreboding mountain peaks around the village as the “great jagged shark teeth of God all round them” (42). Paddy points out that in both the project and in the present time of Brexit, there is a nostalgia for the ‘empire’ (42). As commonly discussed in Brexit literature, there is a strong sense of nostalgia in the society now for the glory of the British empire in the past. The novel points out how this idea of nationalism could be dangerous to consider, through the parallel imagery of the sharp pointy mountain peaks, and as Paddy reminds Richard that “the next dose of imperial fascism” (42) was already in the air of Switzerland’s so-called ‘neutral zone’ (during the World Wars Switzerland remained neutral). As Europe in 1922 was a chaotic year of societal disruptions, problematic borders and political instability, there is a historical parallel here between Europe in 1922 and Brexit in 2019.

The imagery of the Swiss Alps also resonates with that of the Scottish Highlands. Another reference to Brexit in *Spring*, is the setting of the characters’ trip to the battlefield of Culloden (where the Hanoverians defeated the Jacobites in 1746). It is a place of the historical reminder of the union, as well as the longstanding tensions, between Scotland and England which have played a crucial role in Brexit. The characters arrive at this location and reflect on the changes from separation to unity in history and the changes in the present. Audrey Wollen (2019) writes that the centuries for Smith are “like those acetate sheets used on old overhead projectors” which can be “layered, enlarged, transformed.” The novel doesn’t point to a direct conclusion, but

Smith urges us to think about how parallels in history can be reimagined to reflect on the direction the present society is headed towards.

Next, the novel also uses the motif of mountains in artwork as a regenerative transformation. In a scene in the gallery, Richard comes across the largest piece of Tacita Dean's artwork, 'The Montafon Letter' (2017). It is a wall of chalk and slate of "a mountain picture so huge that the wall became mountain and the mountain became a kind of wall" (77). He stops in his tracks to observe this 'chalk on slate' of an avalanche

coming down the mountain picture towards anyone looking at it, an avalanche that had been stilled for just that moment so that whoever saw it had time to comprehend it. Above the mountain peaks the sky was a black so dark it was like a new definition of blackness. As he stood there, what he was looking at stopped being chalk on slate, stopped being a picture of mountain. It became something terrible, seen. (77).

Here, Smith describes how time is paused, and this moment transforms the character's view of the reality again. As in the actual mountain that Richard encounters earlier, this wall of a mountain shows both strength and stillness. The mountainscape was contrasted with the sky and there were other artworks of clouds that were also made with chalk on blackboard in the gallery. Together, the novel uses the ekphrasis of these images of mountains and clouds to show a regenerative power. It also points towards the fact that we find ourselves at a moment in time that is similar to this image, where Brexit and climate change are like avalanches on the horizon. Out of the gallery, Richard reflects on the artworks of clouds and mountains.

They'd made space to breathe possible, up against something breathtaking. After them, the real clouds above London looked different, like they were something you could read as breathing space...the buildings below them, the traffic, the ways

in which the roads intersected...people were passing each other in the street, all of it part of a structure that didn't know it was a structure, but was one all the same. (78).

In this passage, the “structure that didn't know it was a structure” also referred to Richard's personal grief and environmental distress. The ways in which the roads intersected and the people passing each other were all unknowing, singular threads that formed a web together. Richard's relationship with Paddy in the past and his personal losses now are all part of the ‘structure’ of time that he didn't know was a structure. The way the climate and the times had changed were also a part of this structure that people are not in control of. He realizes that people and things all belonged to this “structure” that included Nature and human society.

The artworks of clouds around the mountain and the sky created a new reality for Richard. In *Spring*, the regenerative imagination of mountains points to how people are under the control of the natural rhythm of Nature, and throughout the novel, Nature is depicted as all powerful and above all human workings. The imagination of the mountain suggests taking action through artistic creativity. In a memory where Paddy and Richard discuss the new project on Rainer Maria Rilke and Katherine Mansfield, Richard remembers Paddy saying “[r]eal people in the same place by chance, and not knowing, not meeting. Passing each other so close. Inches. That's brilliant in itself.” (41). She encourages him to let the script show these connections between people who simply pass each other by. She says that the way this story is written reveals a wonderful masterpiece of hope in itself. In another memory, Richard remembers Paddy saying, “We're only here by the grace and the work of others.” (249). Paddy emphasizes on the beauty of people and things falling into place without being instrumentalised or planned by people. Combining Paddy's messages, the artworks of mountains, clouds and sky allowed Richard to see how he fits into this structure in reality despite his grief and

powerlessness to control life and nature. He realizes that his hope lies in the way he proceeds to tell the story in the new project.

Returning to the art of mountains, 'The Montafon Letter' (2017) itself is an artwork that speaks about Brexit, explains the artist Tacita Dean in *The Royal Academy* magazine (Griffin, 2018). Dean says that Brexit is like the anecdote that inspired the title of the artwork. The description of 'The Montafon Letter' in the magazine writes that it is an artwork that consists of nine blackboards, and the title refers to a series of avalanches that had happened in Austria in the 17th century. These avalanches first buried some people, then it buried the priest who went to the site of their burial, and in the final avalanche, it 'unburied' the priest who turned out to still be alive. Comparing the avalanche to Brexit, Dean says that it is devastating, but there is also "hope that the last avalanche will uncover us." (Griffin, 2018). In the same vein, Smith uses the voice of Paddy to say, "[w]ar won't stop, the story says. But enmity can. Things can change over time, what looks fixed and pinned and closed in a life can change and open, and what's unchangeable and impossible at one time will be easily possible in another" (247). In this passage in the novel, Smith points to hope in the uncontrollable cycles of life and time. It also hints at cycles of violence, but moreover, the way of storytelling points to possibilities of rebirth and continuous hope.

Extending the idea of rebirth and regeneration, the novel shows that inspiration from art and re-imagination of history are ways of finding hope again in these difficult times. Also written in *The Royal Academy* magazine, Tim Marlow describes Tacita Dean's optimism: "If there's a straight path between one point and another, she'll question why... and will find a different way to it, and will find interesting things along the way." (Griffin, 2018). The artist Dean emphasizes on the importance of creativity in telling stories. Much like the artist Tacita Dean, and much like Smith herself, the attitude of Smith's character Paddy towards life and making art (films) is rooted in her

curiosity to “do something more, something a bit more unexpected” (20).

In the scene where Richard remembers Paddy and him meeting for the first time, they talk about how to work together on his first solo. Paddy shows him how to create new ways of telling plain stories, saying that “[t]here’s ways to survive these times...and I think one way is the shape the telling takes” (20). This is the starting point of their relationship and lifelong collaboration in filmmaking. This thread in the novel also reminds us of Smith’s partner Sarah Wood, who is an artist, “a found-footage filmmaker” and who works with “the notion of archive” (Elkins, 2019). In Amy Elkins’ interview of Smith’s ideas of art, Smith talks about her collaboration with Wood’s ideas on archives, and her own love of collecting old things (such as pieces of wood, bits of stone or twig). She points out that “[t]he arts are family” and “the formal workings of one form [can be applied] to another” (Elkins, 2019). These influences have shaped the way she uses literal collages in her writing to create stories, or rather, to allow stories to reveal themselves. This memory of Paddy in the novel makes Richard realize that there is hope for surviving these times. It is the way of retelling, re-imagining, re-creating stories and in the process, reshaping the realities that seem straightforward, dull or even despairing.

The first part of the novel *Spring* combines themes of love, loss, art, imagination and memories (both invented and real) of loved ones to showcase the idea of regenerative imagination. The importance of using imagination and artistic inspiration to re-visualize these hard times of Brexit, climate change and overcome emotional distress is again emphasized. The mountains and avalanches are dangerous, intimidating but also regenerative in the way they allow people to be impressed by nature and to realize that people are not in control of life. However, the way people can take action is by the way they choose to tell these stories and think about their realities. Using Paddy’s voice again, the novel says, “[t]here’s a difference between narrative

strategy and reality, but they're symbiotic" (63), meaning that imagination and reality expand and interchange with each other. The novel uses Richard's film project as an example to show how different ways of storytelling can make a great difference in people's projection of the reality.

After discussing the imagination of art and nature (mountains and avalanches), the second part of the novel discusses societal problems and the themes of migration and borders, which I will explain in four points. First, as already mentioned in *Autumn*, the novel notes that this new 'detachment' in the society is different from the earlier times. Paddy points out how it is different now, "People always were [divided]. But people weren't...unfair." (67). Under Brexit, the issue of immigrants (and borders) has intensified the unequal distribution of the resources in the society as well as strengthened the idea of racism. Second, the novel shows the problematic distinction between official documents and individual lives, which links back to the scenes in *Autumn* of passport applications with the 'wrong' sized photograph. In *Spring*, the novel speaks from the perspective of foreign detainees: "my face is the face on this 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." (125). Smith highlights the dehumanizing effect of reducing people to their official textual identity.

Third, the novel points out that borders are problematic. It describes the long queue of "non-people" at the border that are waiting endlessly for the right to enter. The novel describes these people as "faceless nobodies" (126), and the border has become a "breaking point" (126) that separates the 'right' and the 'wrong' faces. Having the wrong face means losing the right to be treated humanely, and be imprisoned while waiting. Fourth, the novel also points out that the way people discuss stories of foreigners are in fact dangerous, as the way these stories are perceived actually

strengthen the idea of racism. The novel speaks from the perspective of an immigrant: “It’s the face you see on dramas, films, or you picture in your head in the novels about people who aren’t you...my face is all about you.” (126). The idea of ‘You’ and ‘me’ in this passage points out that stories of immigrants can emphasize the wrong idea; instead of connecting people, they reveal alien forms of ‘otherness’.

Next, I will analyze how the characters in the novel treat these problems through their regenerative imagination. Here, the plot of the novel jumps to the setting of an Immigration Removal Centre which looks like a prison, where Brittany works for the SA4A. This second part of the novel describes life in the bleak environment of the detainee center. Brittany describes it like an ‘underworld’, and they call the detainees “deets”. When Brit finds herself saying “How dare you ask for a blanket” (166), she feels something has gone wrong, but does not realize what the company is doing to her mind. The way the detainees are treated are ghastly and Brittany has become desensitized.

In these scenes, the novel does not only depict immigrant characters as victims, but also uses an immigrant character as a unique and inspiring heroine. Like the role of Lux in *Winter*, in *Spring* Smith uses the character Florence, a twelve-year-old schoolgirl who is an immigrant living in England with a foster family, to ignite the other character’s (Brit) emotions and compassion. In the novel, Florence is described to have magical powers that allow her to exit and enter places at any chosen time. She overcomes the barriers of ‘borders’ as she uses her magical powers to create passages for herself and set people free. In the Immigration Removal Centre, there are rumours saying that Florence helped the detainees in various ways using her special ability, such as making the director clean the detainees’ toilets, and freeing some women who were trapped in a sex-house in one night.

In one scene where Brit is on her way to work, she meets Florence (who seems to

have cut school) at a train station. Florence shows Brit the location on a postcard that she is trying to get to and says that she wants to “travel with no footprint” (172) therefore she doesn’t want to use a computer to look up the transportation. After figuring out that the location is in Kingussie, Scotland, Florence sets her mind to take the train there. Brit watches as “Florence [tells] the man who look[s] after the barriers that she didn’t have a ticket [and t]he man opened the barriers anyway” (177). Brit is alarmed but finds herself feeling a spark of compassion over her conversation with Florence. She unexpectedly gives up her plan to go to work, and follows Florence on her trip (however, she couldn’t cross the barriers without a ticket).

The second part of the novel first uses a story about spring that is written in Florence’s notebook to reimagine these societal problems of racism. The story takes place in a village where everyone believed that sacrificing a young maiden to the gods was the only way to bring spring back into the world during wintertime. In the story, a young girl was chosen to dance herself to death so that everyone could celebrate an innocent death and the gods would be happy. The notion of an innocent death points to the victimization of the female sex, and this way of making the gods happy would unrealistically symbolize the natural rhythm of seasons returning, or the reversal of the impacts of climate change. Unexpectedly, the girl that was chosen to be sacrificed refused, and said to the public, “I’m not your symbol. Go and lose yourself or find yourself in some other story ... [because t]here are much less bloody ways to hope for spring...Better ways of working fruitfully with the climate and the seasons, than by sacrificing people to them”. (226). Returning to discussing the imagination of seasons, Smith is once again rethinking stereotypical views of spring, which refer to fertility but also points to violence. Furthermore, the gruesome tradition of human sacrifice in the tale refers to taking away someone’s right to freedom in the present society. The girl in the story is similar to Florence’s role in the novel as an immigrant character and alludes

to the perspectives of (the female) gender.

In the three books of the Seasonal Quartet, Daniel from *Autumn*, Lux from *Winter* and Florence in *Spring* are all immigrants in Britain without connections and are not originally 'English'. People around them often dismiss their existence, much as Lux had been almost invisible in the crowded train station. Florence says that "People can look right through me. Certain white people in particular can look right though young people and also black and mixed race people like we aren't here" (192). Makkai (2019) writes that Smith turns the "social invisibility" of these immigrant characters into "a kind of superpower" (Makkai, 2019). Whereas in *Winter*, Lux stood out to Art at the bus station reading a Chicken Cottage menu, and stood poised in the train station that was full of busy crowds. She presented an air of simplicity and creativity which had softened the defensive walls in the hearts of other characters. In *Spring*, Florence uses her 'invisibility' to cross 'borders' (locked doors in the detainee center, train station barriers, and ticket inspections on trains) unnoticed. She comes up with brilliant insights (in her notebook) that use the language of a school girl to point to truths that adult characters had not wanted to acknowledge. The novels overturn the victimized image of immigrant figures. Smith's non-English hero and heroines change the way stories of foreigners like themselves are told. Instead of becoming 'someone else's story', Daniel, Lux and Florence are admired by other English characters that they interact with, through their imaginative creativity and their aspiring characters.

Second, the novel uses this story of spring to reflect on different groups of people in the present society. It describes people in power who have orchestrated these events as the outraged public who "get off on the brutality" (226). Then it describes the followers of those in power as people who are worried about not doing what everyone else is doing because "the ones who get off on it might decide to choose [them]" (226). It also points to a third group of people out in the audience, who "like a good riot" and

“weren’t getting what they’d paid for” (227). These people refer to the critics on the internet who are writing “furiously on their screens with their little iPad pens...tap[ing] furiously at their iPhones” (226). These descriptions resonate with Richard’s remark in the novel, that racism is “[l]egitimized...on all the news and in all the papers, on so many screens, grace of the god of endless new beginnings, the god we call the internet” (67). He refers to people ‘legitimizing’ racism by encouraging more violence through broadcasting nasty comments behind hidden identities on the internet. These onlookers also refer to the people reading or hearing about the stories of immigrants with hostility, and who emphasize on the difference between foreign ‘others’ and themselves. In this way, these stories and news are instrumentalized to create more enmity and to increase the acceptance of racism.

Third, the novel renews the idea of borders through a scene where Florence and Brittany are on a journey to Scotland by train. As they reach the border between England and Scotland, Florence imagines that if ‘borders’ didn’t divide places, but united them, and that these “border crossings places” (196) would allow people to become “doubly possible” (196) when they crossed the borders. With this idea,

instead of having to prove who you are with a paper booklet or by showing a screen your eye or the print in your finger or the information about your face. Instead, you could prove who you are by what you see with your eyes and by what you make with your hands (196).

Smith’s ideas of immigrants and borders point towards a symbiotic society, that showed collectivity of groups and inclusiveness towards one another. This example can be linked back to the example of a symbiotic coexistence between humans and nature in *Autumn*. Using different ways of eliminating divisions, Smith points out that the common understanding of ‘borders’ are problematic. This second part of the novel exemplifies these problems of human rights, textual identities, and border crossings. In

the place of textual identities, divisions and competition between people, Smith points out the important dimension of creativity with one's eyes and hands. The novel emphasizes on our shared human condition and the way people are all graced with regenerative creativity to transform our realities.

Lastly, I will discuss a recurring imagery in the three novels and how *Spring* suggests thinking about climate change and children of this generation. Aside from these two storylines, *Spring* has a third narrative perspective, where Smith depicts nature's power over life on Earth. It is separate from the two story plots, as if a dialogue between the narrator and the narrative is taking place. In a passage which describes the power of nature (and the seasons) despite the ongoing environmental deterioration, the narrative voice represents an anthropomorphized nature. It combines the motif of plants in the three novels: the green plants thriving in nature in *Autumn*, the plants surviving through plastic and waste in *Winter*, and the plants that have yet to grow in *Spring*.

I'm the child who's been buried in leaves. The leaves rot down: here I am. Or picture a crocus in snow. See the ring of the thaw round the crocus? That's the door open into the earth. I'm the green in the bulb and the moment of split in the seed, the unfurl of the petal, the dabber of ends of the branches of trees with the green as if green is alight. The plants that push up through the junk and the plastic, earlier, later, they're coming, regardless. The plants shift beneath you regardless. (*Spring*, 7).

In this passage, the imagery of the 'child buried in leaves' refers to the photograph '*Petite fille aux feuilles mortes jardin du Luxembourg Paris 1946*' which was taken by the French photographer Édouard Boubat. In *Autumn*, Daniel sends a postcard of this picture to his lover, who turns out to be the character Sophia in *Winter*. This imagery of a 'child in leaves' symbolizes the children of this generation that are living under environmental destruction and who suffer from nuclear contamination. *Autumn*

describes this imagery as the fear that “a child just playing in leaves could look, for the first time to the casual eye, like ...a nuclear after-child, the leaves hanging off her looked like skin become rags, hanging to one side as if skin IS nothing but leaves.” (*Autumn*, 9). It evokes nostalgia and melancholia, for in “one blink of a camera eye and that child dressed in leaves became all these things: sad, terrible, beautiful, funny, terrifying, dark, light, charming, fairystory, folkstory, truth.” (*Autumn*, 9). In *Winter*, Sophia compares the imaginary ‘disembodied head’ to “the child adorned in leaves in the park in Paris with her back to the camera on the old black and white postcard” (*Winter*, 8). This ‘head of a child’ refers to the children of this generation. It has been haunting Sophia for days, and she cannot help feel sympathy for it. This imagery of a ‘child in leaves’ also refers to children that have been forced into underage labour in harsh and dangerous environments and who are suffering from industrial pollution. In *Spring*, Richard imagines Paddy as a child at thirteen,

She is so thin he can see right through her. Behind her there’s a line of children that goes so far back it never stops. They’re in clothes as ragged as suits of dead leaves. Their hands are the only things small enough to reach inside the industrial machines and clean out the oily gunk and the fibres, of which their lungs are already full. But no hand can go inside and clean out their lungs. (*Spring*, 250).

The novels associate the imagery of the ‘child in leaves’ with children in poverty who are wearing ragged clothes or children whose skin is peeling off due to nuclear contamination.

Although these passages depict despairing sceneries for the children of this (and the next) generation, *Spring* suggests hopeful ways of thinking about these children and the environment. In the novel, Florence, the immigrant-child-heroine warns people of the urgency to treat these environmental problems. She says that “if the force of just five more nuclear bombs going off anywhere in the world happens...an eternal nuclear

autumn will set in and there'll be no more seasons" (183). She refers to herself as Cassandra, the mythological prophet who tried to warn people about the imminent ruin of Troy but was ignored by the Trojans. The imagery of the nuclear-after child and Florence's fear of nuclear bombs in the novels warn about the danger of nuclear weapons humans are using. The imagery of a 'head of a child', 'leaves', and 'ragged skin' repeatedly remind us of the aftermaths in events like Chernobyl and nuclear wars. In another passage, Florence says,

We are now globally just five nuclear explosions away from it becoming the only season that we'll have on this planet... Given that I am twelve years old, and there are just twelve years left to stop the world being ruined by climate change, I'd say there's an urgency the age of me to do something to stop it (233).

Florence also resembles the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg who led child protests to protect the environment. The novel compares Florence to Paddy's two sons who turn a blind eye to ecological and political issues. They tell Richard not to encourage Paddy in discussing "climate change or the rise of the right or the migrant crisis or Brexit or Windrush or Grenfell or the Irish border" (68). Paddy thinks they are "[a] generation of children who've no idea they're going to die" (71). Florence acts oppositely, as she acknowledges the urgency of humans facing climate change and potential nuclear destruction, she also encourages people to take action right now. The imagery of the postcard is a foreboding message in the novel and Florence seems to step out of the photograph, representing the child that must take action to stop the world from being ruined by climate change.

In the two storylines from the third novel *Spring*, I have explored the interrelated themes of climate change and Brexit, art and nature, immigration and borders. In the plot surrounding the relationship between Richard and Paddy, the motif of mountains that first seemed intimidating and threatening became regenerative inspiration for the

characters. Firstly, the enormity of the mountains emphasizes the character Richard's personal grief and depicts a dangerous landscape. Secondly, taking inspiration from imaginary conversations in the novel, Richard overcomes limitations in reality and reconnects with loved ones whom he has lost. Thirdly, the way the characters Paddy and Richard discuss and recreate art in the novel helps them reimagine the society under Brexit. In the second part of the narrative that focuses on Brit and Florence, Smith treats the problems of racism and refugee-ism through Florence's story of spring in her notebook, and her ideas of borders. Finally, the recurring imagery from Édouard Boubat's photograph combines the omnipresent role of nature in the novels. Whilst it depicts a problematic future for children in this generation, the novel also shows that children are exactly the hope needed to change the future.

Spring urges action, and a sensitivity to the current times, exemplified by artistic and female characters Paddy and Florence. Paddy functions like a wise elder whose time on Earth has reached an end, not unlike Daniel in *Autumn*. Paddy's and Florence's hope and spirit are similar in the ways they look for hope through creativity. *Spring* looks for hope to cope with emotional stress in the present, as well as face these irreversible losses of climate change in the future. Despite the rising temperature of the climate which destabilizes the familiarity of the seasons, *Spring* points out that when all hope is lost, and the society and regularity of the climate seem to fall apart, there is still hope in imaginative regeneration for those in the present and in the natural rhythm of nature.

5. Conclusion

Critics discussing climate change in literature have pointed out the need for literary representations of climate change beyond the cli-fi genre. Not only have they found traditional apocalyptic climate literature inadequate of narrating the climate story, these narratives risk painting a hopeless view of the future. As climate fictions help people to understand and imagine the realities of climate change as well as the possibilities of facing climate change, focusing on a partial aspect of climate change's impacts such as singular natural disasters, reduces people's awareness of the complexity and scale of climate change's influences. Critics such as Kate Marshall have pointed out that people's experience of the weather and seasons help them relate to climate change, and novelist Zadie Smith has pointed out that there is a lack of discussion on emotions in response to climate change. Ali Smith's themes in her novels respond to these problems. This thesis aimed to explore how Ali Smith responds to climate change, by analyzing three of her novels from the Seasonal Quartet through exploring themes of art, nature and seasonality, gender, and migration. It can be concluded that Smith's strategies differ from her contemporaries in various ways and her themes also broaden the ways climate change is represented in fiction. At the same time, these novels reveal how the societal issues under Brexit and climate change are connected.

This thesis analyzes how these novels point to the regenerative imagination of art and nature as the keys to finding hope in the present time under societal and environmental problems. The method used in this thesis is by identifying the ways regenerative imaginations are illustrated in Smith's novels, and by exploring how art and nature are connected. Through the different examples in the novels, this thesis attempts to show how these regenerative examples of art and nature can be helpful for others thinking about climate change and Brexit. This thesis also shows how these

novels join debates on seasonality and environmental emotions which combine themes of gender, art, and migration to expand the existing templates of climate fiction.

First, by discussing the experiences of altered seasons under climate change, the three novels of the Seasonal Quartet describe the characters' everyday experience of climate change. This approach turns away from the focus on apocalyptic futures and natural disasters in traditional climate literature, such as J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009). Using existing research on the cultural role of phenology, this thesis shows how these novels portray the experience of phenology and seasonality under climate change. Although this thesis does not find a solution to these disruptions in environmental time directly, it explores how Smith rethinks cycles of seasonality and time.

In these novels, despite the un-familiarization of seasons now, Smith uses conventional cultural meanings of seasons to help reconnect the relationship between humans and nature. At the same time, these novels also point to innovative connotations of the seasons. The season of autumn is related to emotions of nostalgia, but Smith also points out more complex emotions that are related to the environment under climate change. Autumn is also traditionally known as a season of transformation, and Smith extends this imagination to a transformation of life cycles and human-plant transformations. Smith also renews our understanding of autumn, as not only the season in between seasons, but also the season that begins the seasonal cycle. Winter is traditionally connected to a time of coldness and death of nature. Under climate change, instead of having snow, there is chemical pollution (that looks like snow) in the air. In the second novel *Winter*, Smith's discussion of earth and stone also allows us to associate winter with a time of rest and reconciliation. Lastly, spring is a season traditionally related to fertility and rebirth. Whilst the novel points out these aspects, it also points to repetition of violence and social injustice. Smith's innovative idea of

spring is in the way nature is described as a higher order of power that oversees these problems in the society and the transformative stages of nature will reveal hope in the end. Smith shows that despite the unfamiliar seasons we have now, people can still relate to them and find hope in facing the present issues of climate change.

Second, the topic of environmental distress is explored in the novels. The characters in the novels experience Earth emotions such as solastalgia and eco-anxiety. In line with Glenn Albrecht's call for Generation Symbiocene, Smith's novels support this war of emotions by suggesting ways of regeneration. Although Smith develops and illustrates how environmental distress is eminent in the current society, as is shown by the characters in the novels, Smith doesn't focus on the negative aspects of these problems.

In many places, she points out the importance of thinking and viewing the world in a symbiotic way. First, through imagining creative interactions and dialogues with loved ones, characters in the novels engage in discussions about art, or participate (imaginatively) in activities of creating art. These imaginations help bring insight to the way the characters living in the present view their realities, and they find hope for surviving despairing times. These imaginary interactions demonstrate a symbiotic way of living in the present and living through their imaginations, which means that the reality and imagination are interconnected and shape the real space people live in. The examples in the three novels discuss this idea differently. In *Autumn*, the novel uses examples of multilingualism and literal collage of images to expand imagination of the living space between humans and nonhumans, showing that everything (plants and people) is interrelated. *Winter* shows how the choices that people make and the lifestyle they choose are all political, even if they detach themselves from thinking about politics. It also points out that the society and nature cannot be separated. *Spring* first points out that different forms of art (such as photography, film, and artwork) are different ways of viewing the world and that they are all connected. Next, the novel points to how

borders should establish a bridge between places. The novels show how things (people, plants, place, and art) can be understood in relation to one another, and that this way of understanding the world helps broaden people's capacity of including others.

Second, the characters in the novels relate to different objects in nature, such as plants, stones, and mountains. *Autumn* uses the imagination of plants in several scenarios. It resolves problems such as the fear of aging, and experiences of solastalgia towards the altered landscape. Similarly, in *Winter* and *Spring*, imaginations of stones and mountains regenerate depressing environmental emotions. The stones bring relief under stress in the society, whilst mountains impressively establish the power of nature. Smith's texts accordingly broaden debates on environmental emotions and suggest innovative ways to counter these emotions. In these novels, she continually suggests to look for hope in the form of regenerative transformation through objects, seasons and art.

Third, in these novels, art and the applications of the characters' imaginations are crucial. Although language is sometimes depicted as dangerous and can limit people's imaginations, it occasionally plays a similar role to art in these novels. These novels show how regenerative powers of both art and language are similar to the regenerative power of nature itself. Through feminist artworks that depict natural elements, these artworks as well as the objects in nature recur to help transform the ways characters view their realities. Ali Smith's discussions of artworks focus on ways of creativity and the natural elements that can be reinterpreted in these artworks. Using the creative potential of art as a solution to the problems in these novels becomes plausible as Smith expands the applications of these artworks to explaining environmental emotions. Through art, the characters in the novels observe nature with renewed vision, and relate to it from a collaborative and appreciative perspective. In these novels, regenerative art inspires ways of thinking about how to create and nurture hope in the present.

Fourth, Smith combines the themes of gender, migration and borders to reflect on societal problems under Brexit. Different from Paul Kingsolver's ideas, instead of agreeing with a stronger English masculinity and British identity, Smith attempts to regenerate stereotypical perspectives of gender as well as celebrate the diversity of immigrants in Britain. These novels point out that there is a general sense of nostalgia for nationalism now, and a dangerous inclination to fascism is on the rise. Although nostalgia is a prominent emotion depicted in the novels, these novels don't particularly look to the golden past of British history as the answer to reviving Britain's status after Brexit. As a matter of fact, Smith changes these notions of nostalgia and focuses on how time and memory can be transformed into strength in the present. Smith continues to focus on the positive aspects of hope for the present time, by finding ways to take action.

Using the themes of migration and borders, Smith points out how characters who are immigrants bring hope and unique ideas to a group of despairing characters. The novels point out that Britain would not exist without immigrants (as most of the characters in the novel are from diverse origins), and without those immigrants there would be no hope for the situations that seem despairing. These immigrant characters also have an appreciation for art and literature, and would apply them to their lives. At the same time, Smith rethinks the meaning of borders, by urging people to think in a symbiotic way. She points out that crossing borders should allow people to embrace the idea of duality and enlarge their understanding of viewing geographic locations. Instead of separating nations and people, borders should make people 'double' and more. Whilst many of her Brex-lit contemporaries discuss nationalism, Smith focuses on a global sense of identity. The issues that are troubling the British society are actually part of the global economy which are brought by societal and environmental changes worldwide. The novels compare the present times to historical events as well as events

happening in other places to understand these trends and issues in the present society, pointing out that climate change and migration bring people in the world together.

To conclude, Ali Smith's approach to the present societal and ecological crisis is by rethinking how these themes are linked to one another, and how they can be regenerated to find new ways of taking action in the present time. Two lines from *Autumn* sum up Smith's idea of regeneration in these three novels of the Seasonal Quartet: "Imagine if pictures in a gallery weren't just pictures but were actually sort of alive". (Smith, 2016:244) "Imagine if time could be kind of suspended, rather than us be suspended in it". (Smith, 2016:244). As the preceding paragraphs have explained in detail, Smith emphasizes the importance of transforming the present time in one's hands through regenerative imagination of art and nature.

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