

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLMOUC

FACULTY OF ARTS

Department of English and American Studies

Bc. Anna Řeháčková

Metamodern Sensibility in Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

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### Acknowledgment

I declare that I have worked on the thesis “Metamodern Sensibility in Ali Smith’s *Seasonal Quartet*” independently, using only the sources listed in the bibliography.

In Olomouc, 5 April 2024

Bc. Anna Řeháčková

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# 1. Introduction

Ali Smith, a contemporary Scottish novel and short story author, is considered a prominent figure in contemporary Scottish literature. Her *Seasonal Quartet* consisting of four novels (*Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer*) ranks among the contemporary literary canon with *Autumn* listed in “The 100 best books of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>1</sup> This thesis’s aim is to analyze Smith’s *Seasonal Quartet* and identify the characteristic narrative features which would classify Smith’s novels to the metamodernist canon.

First, I will outline the history of Scottish literature, with a central focus on the female literary production, underlining some key figures.

Second, I will set a theoretical background concerning modernism and postmodernism and the following metamodernism. I will describe the main characteristic literary features and tendencies of both modernism and postmodernism from which I will introduce the recent trend called metamodernism. Its supporters tend to be highly regarded on the one hand but criticized for the lack of clear boundaries and vague definition on the other one.

Third, I will focus my attention on the author of *Seasonal Quartet* Ali Smith, her authentic writing style, and the literary devices that are characteristic of the author’s narratives. I will briefly summarize the author’s biography, provide necessary information regarding her literary career and name some of her notable works. Then, I will characterize her distinctive writing style based mainly on the novels and short stories I have read.

Fourth, I will examine the novels in order to discover literary devices which determine whether Smith’s novels exhibit signs of metamodern sensibility or not. First of all, for each novel, I am about to summarize the essential storylines in brief to provide the main ideas and themes of the story for unacquainted readers. Then, I will focus my attention to search for both modern and postmodern features in order to be able to determine metamodern sensibility characteristics occurring in the novel.

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<sup>1</sup> ”The 100 best books of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,“ The Guardian, September 21, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/21/best-books-of-the-21st-century>

## 2. Scottish Literature

### 2.1 Origins and Development

Scottish literature finds its origins in the traditional ballads, epic poetry, and folklore of medieval Scotland. The early Scottish compositions, frequently transmitted orally or written in the Scots language, celebrated the nation's history, mythical heroes, and legends. This period marked the emergence of distinctively Scottish themes and cultural expressions within the broader literary landscape.

According to Gifford, contemporary Scottish authors are influenced by two opposing 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary streams of their forerunners. The first one is the era of so called Scottish Renaissance dated roughly from 1920 to 1945, and the second one is the Post-World War II era, dated from 1945 to 1980s.

The Scottish Renaissance was a literary movement characterized by a strong emphasis on the national identity and sense of cultural distinctiveness. Under the tutelage of Hugh MacDiarmid, Scottish Renaissance put emphasis on “a desire for roots, for Scottish identity defined in terms of traditional language and place”.<sup>2</sup> MacDiarmid was also one of the key figures of the movement who played a crucial role in reviving the use of Scots literature written in the original Scots language. However, the rediscovery of the national roots was not the only characteristics of Scottish Renaissance literature. By contrast, the period saw influences of modernist literature, with experimentation in form and style. The then writers incorporated modernist techniques in their epic, lyric, and also drama writings.

Regarding the Post-World War II era, one can spot the shift towards existentialist and absurdist themes. The existential questions and the absurdity of human existence were influenced by continental European philosophies. This era is also characterized by a move away from the rural focus of the Scottish Renaissance to an exploration of urban life and its challenges due to the ongoing process of urbanization and modernization in Europe. This increasing changing process corresponds with technological changes, including the influence of mass media and the evolving role of technology in general. Additionally, the shared belief of unity of the nation from

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<sup>2</sup> Douglass Gifford, Sarah Dunigan, and Alan MacGillivray. *Scottish Literature*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 722-723.



Scottish Renaissance slowly converts into the importance of individualism, and the first indications of issues of gender and identity appears. Authors started to explore the above-mentioned themes and employ them into their works, contributing to discussion on feminism and the fluidity of identity.

To conclude, contemporary Scottish writers have been influenced not merely by 20<sup>th</sup> century affairs. Their work is also shaped by numerous distinct phases and significant milestones of the former nation's history, including the Acts of Union or Jacobite risings, yet also several referendums concerning political affairs. Moreover, while considering historical events and milestones that has shaped contemporary Scottish literature, the long-standing effort to Scottish independence cannot be omitted. The prominent overshadowing of British Empire has been affecting Scottish national ambience, and resulting in a reinforcement of national pride, honour and unflinching desire to become an independent country.

## 2.2 Caledonian Antisyzygy

Scottish literary tradition is rooted in the concept of Caledonian Antisyzygy. Even though the term Caledonian Antisyzygy might seem unfamiliar and sophisticated with Polish origins, its interpretation is fairly simple. This concept was introduced and coined in 1919 by Scottish literary critic G. Gregory Smith in his book *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* and it is being used to capture and explore the inherent duality or tension within the Scottish psyche. The term "Caledonia" refers to an "ancient Roman name for part of northern Britain"<sup>3</sup>, that is in other words a name for present-day Scotland. "Syzygy" has been used widely across several fields, from astrology and philosophy to literature and it implies "to yoke together"<sup>4</sup>. The prefix – anti is recognized to signify "opposite" or "against" and therefore the connection of the words "anti" and "syzygy" form an oxymoronic concept which is aptly described by G. Gregory Smith as "a zigzag of contradictions."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Harper, Douglas. "Etymology of Caledonia." Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/Caledonia>. Accessed 10 March, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Harper, Douglas. "Etymology of syzygy." Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/syzygy>. Accessed 10 March, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, G. Gregory. *Scottish Literature, Character & Influence*. Macmillan and co., limited, 1919. *Internet Archive*, 2007, <https://archive.org/details/scottishliteratu00smitiala/page/4/mode/1up>. PDF download

In the context of literature, Caledonian Antisyzygy points out a tension between different elements. The contrast can be demonstrated on several levels within the literary work, for instance past in contrary to present, reason in contrary to emotion, individualism in contrary to collectivism, to name a few. Caledonian antisyzygy serves as a useful tool in writing process as it enables authors to reflect on the cultural, historical, and social tensions within Scotland and readers are offered considerable insight into the complexities of national identity and tradition.

In order to provide a deeper insight into the concept of Caledonian Antisyzygy and explain the issue more comprehensibly, an illustrative example of it could be a Scottish modern classic novel *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh. In the novel there is a clear contrast between the harsh reality of urban life in Glasgow on the one hand, and character's desire for something beyond or even the escape, on the other one. By presenting contrasting themes or ideas, Caledonian Antisyzygy allows readers to think critically about the text and readers may find themselves identifying with characters, which can lead to introspection and self-reflection. Moreover, the text can encourage and provoke a range of feelings in the readers.

### **2.3 Scottish Female Literature**

With the exception of Muriel Spark, who can be considered as the first personality known of the Female Scottish literature and who “established solid (if geographically distant) foundations for twentieth-century Scottish women’s writing”<sup>6</sup> there seemed to be no traces of Scottish female literary production up to 1990s. In 1990s several notable names came to the female literary scene, gained their prominence and remained on the spotlight until nowadays, contributing to the rich literary tradition of Scotland. Building on the foundations laid by earlier generations, writers like A. L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway, and Ali Smith brought a fresh perspective to Scottish literature, challenging the literary traditions, addressing issues of identity and social change, and incorporating or rejecting elements from the Scottish Renaissance and post-World War II literature.

The British literary scene of 1990s was characterized by the increasing popularity of literary awards ceremonies, which played a significant role in shaping the

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<sup>6</sup> Germanà, M. Contemporary Fiction. In G. Norquay (Ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women’s Writing*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) 152.

literary landscape of the time by bringing attention to various undiscovered authors and their works. One of the writers, who received recognition due to the literary awards ceremonies, was A. L. Kennedy. With her first literary work *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990) she gained a reputation and started to be considered as one of the respected literary figures. Kennedy's prose often delves into existential and philosophical themes, exploring the realm of interpersonal relationships, the fundamental questions of existence and the human psyche. Her work inquires into the complexities of human emotions, offering reader an understanding of the psychological landscapes inhabited by her characters. Providing readers with profound subjects as death, murder, violence, rape, and existential despair, Kennedy is also noted for infusing her narratives with dark humour and wit, which together with aspects mentioned above create complex and popular narratives.

Another prominent name in contemporary Scottish literature is none other than Janice Galloway. Just as Kennedy, Galloway became known to the literary public in 1990s thanks to the award ceremonies boom. Her first published novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), she obtained widespread recognition for its innovative narrative structure and exploration of mental health issues. Galloway consistently places female protagonists at the forefront, confronting the challenges inherent in a patriarchal social framework. Fundamental to Galloway's authorship are themes of alienation and desperation, with a distinct emphasis on the unequal status of women within social structures.

Janice Galloway and A. L. Kennedy along with Ali Smith continue to command a central position in literary criticism, retaining both popularity and critical acclaim. This enduring relevance can be attributed to the compelling narratives, often concerning the complexity of human relationships with a profound insight, and authors' ability to captivate readers with rich storytelling. These authors address universal themes such as love, alienation, and existentialism, offering a unique perspective on various issues. Moreover, readers are enthralled by the timeless themes that are relevant even nowadays.



### 3. Metamodernism

In the human history, epochs have been demarcated by distinctive cultural and intellectual progress, and society attempted to come up with the most convenient names in accordance with specific features each epoch was significant of. On that account, nowadays one can recognize stages in human history such as Stone age, Bronze age, to name a few. The modern history employs naming of the modern periods according to cultural, ideological, literal and art trends that are specific for each era. In directing our concentration toward literary periods and movements, for instance, we can distinguish Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romantic period, and so forth. The literary landscape of the last century is characterized by occurrence of two successive literary and cultural movements, namely modernism and postmodernism. Both modernism and postmodernism will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, setting the stage for the exploration and comprehension of a forthcoming intellectual movement.

With an upcoming millennium the awaiting of new tendencies and trends emerged in every aspect of life. For example, Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm expresses the desire for something new in the preface of his book *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory*: “After something has been destroyed, something new must be built, and for something new to be built, a movement is necessary.”<sup>7</sup> The generally respected idea that postmodernism came to its nearly end is indisputable. The evolution beyond postmodernism was described by several theoreticians who came up with various definitions and names for the new era. One can come across terms such as post-postmodernism, post-millennialism, trans-postmodernism.

One of the numerous ideas to invent a convenient term for post-postmodern society (and according to my opinion the most accurate one) was the one of Alan Kirby, who discussed so called *pseudo-modernism* or *digimodernism*. In his essay *The Death of Postmodernism And Beyond*, he mentioned the shallowness and banality that results from the culture facilitated by technological advancements such as the Internet, interactive television, smart phones, and other technological inventions. He stated these above-mentioned inventions to be the pseudo-modern cultural phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup> Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm. Preface. *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012, 99. x.

Despite efforts by various academics and theorists, who came up with several names, the designation that has gained acceptance within the academic community and is nowadays commonly used and agreed on is *metamodernism*.

## 4. Introducing Metamodernism

Although the term metamodernism was coined in 1975 by Mas'ud Zavarzade<sup>8</sup>, it began to gain prominence at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to gain insight into the matter of metamodernism, it is essential to be acquainted with the substance and fundamental features of literary (but also philosophical, cultural, and intellectual) movements of the last century - modernism and postmodernism - that preceded the aforementioned metamodernism.

### 4.1 Modernism

Influenced by the First World War, emerging in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, modernism was a literary and also cultural movement characterized by a frequent quest for innovation. The tremendous impacts of First World War led to a hope and strong belief in better future. Rejecting the certainties and traditional values of the Victorian age, mainly religious beliefs, modernism is also characterized as an age of reason with a strong belief in individualism and progress, driven by advancements in science, technology and industry. Industrialization was a significant contribution that shaped the then atmosphere. Innovations such as the steam engine, and electricity revolutionized processes, leading to a greater efficiency and productivity. New factories and manufacturing facilities were established and prepared to employ large numbers of workers. Industrialization caused a rapid urbanization as a desire to live in rural areas faded out. As a result of that people started to migrate from rural areas to cities in order to seek for employment and opportunities that urbanized areas offered.

Modernism is characterized by a widespread confidence in the power of human reason and rationality and people from all social classes were abounded with an extravagant optimism for a bright future. However, with such high and naive expectations, the awakening and disillusionment must have come inevitably. Although the industrialization brought an economic prosperity for most of the population, it also resulted in harsh working conditions – workers often faced long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and low wages. Despite the drawbacks that this era brought, people still believed in scientific progress, formal equality, freedom, and social, scientific, and

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<sup>8</sup> Seth Abramson, "What Is Metamodernism?," *Huffpost*, January 9, 2017, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-metamodernism\\_b\\_586e7075e4b0a5e600a788cd](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-metamodernism_b_586e7075e4b0a5e600a788cd)

technological progress. Regarding the social position, modernism “elevates the individual and the inner being over the social human being and prefers the unconscious to the self-conscious.”<sup>9</sup>

Modernism in literature is consistently associated with Ezra Pound’s quotation ‘Make it new’ as an effort to a decisive break from traditional ways of writing (in poetry, the break signified the rejection of “traditional meters in favour of free verse”<sup>10</sup>) and introduction of new and experimental trends in literature. Ezra Pound, “widely credited as the inventor of ‘Imagist’ poetry”<sup>11</sup>, set an example with his authorial poetry with free verse and above all with his globally recognized poem ‘In a Station of the Metro’. Other eminent authors who are considered modernists are e.g. T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, W. H. Auden, and James Joyce to mention but a few.

## 4.2 Characteristic Features of Modern Narrative

### 4.2.1 Symbolism

The term symbolism originally refers to a movement, that originated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, led by a group of French writers, who called themselves symbolists. In its restricted sense and literature, symbolism stands for a literary device that uses symbols to communicate a particular idea and therefore allows the reader to use their imagination. In other words, symbolists “stressed the priority of suggestion and evocation over the direct description and explicit analogy.”<sup>12</sup> The author describes an image in order to not indicate his intention literally. The author uses symbols as a device to represent his ideas beyond the literal meanings of their concepts. This literary device helps the literary work to be more vivid and imaginative and therefore each reader can come up with their interpretation. As an example of symbolism, I can provide an image of a wedding ring which with its circle shape evokes an eternal commitment, or an image of light which signifies clarity, purity, and enlightenment and is associated with a higher power.

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<sup>9</sup> C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 308.

<sup>10</sup> Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 140.

<sup>11</sup> Pat Rogers ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 412.

<sup>12</sup> Dinah Birch ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 969-970.



### 4.2.2 Flashback Technique

As the term itself suggests, it is a technique that employs flashbacks interrupting the main chronological narrative “for the purpose of recalling a situation that is relevant to the developing plot, or to clarify points of information.”<sup>13</sup> The flashback technique is also intended for providing detailed info from preceding events. The flashback technique (or analepsis) occurs not merely in the literature but is also popular in cinematography where it “functions to clarify some psychological aspect of a character or to shed light on the source of a conflict.”<sup>14</sup> The flashback technique has been used across genres. A prime example of the flashback technique might be presented in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, where the flashback about the main protagonists, Heathcliff and Catherine, is narrated by Nelly and Lockwood and complete the main storyline.

### 4.2.3 Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness had become an accepted literary device applied in modern novels. The stream of consciousness can be understood as “the ‘flow’ of impressions, memories, and sense-impressions through the mind by abandoning accepted forms of syntax, punctuation, and logical connection”<sup>15</sup>, to put it simply, it depicts the way people think, the actual mental process happening in one’s mind. An example of the stream of consciousness can be seen in Ali Smith’s earlier novel *Hotel World*:

## 4.3 Postmodernism

To provide a definition of postmodernism entails a challenge due to its elusive nature - there is no straightforward definition of postmodernism. According to Simon Lampas, defining postmodern is even against its own nature since “clear and concise process of identification and definition is one of the key elements of rationality that the postmodern sets out to challenge”<sup>16</sup>. In his book *The Postmodern*, he also accepts the plurality of postmodernism and mentions the problem of defining the term. The idea of universal definition of postmodernism denies another literary critic, Linda Hutcheon, by

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<sup>13</sup> Frank Beaver, *Dictionary of Film Terms* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2015), 116.

<sup>14</sup> William Guynn ed., *The Routledge Companion to Film History* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 212.

<sup>15</sup> Birch ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 958.

<sup>16</sup> Simon Lampas, *The Postmodern* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 4.

highlighting its contradictory nature. In her *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she sees postmodernism as “a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges.”<sup>17</sup>

Considering the fact that postmodernism is quite a recent phenomenon, we must take into consideration the factors which contribute to and influence the perception of it, most importantly the significance of mass media and popular culture. Strinati describes postmodernism as “the emergence of society in which the mass media and popular culture are the most important and powerful institutions, and control and shape all other types of social relationships.”<sup>18</sup> It is beyond doubt that aforementioned lines are accurate. As a matter of fact, exposure to repeated messages and accessibility of information have an extensive impact on people’s rational thinking, opinion formation and decision making. Mass media’s means to achieve desired goals are social media platforms, newspapers, magazines, radio or television.

Upon closer examination, the task of establishing a universally accepted and unifying definition of postmodernism seems almost impossible due to the lack of consensus among theorists and society in general. However, for my purposes and in order to set a theoretical background for metamodernism, which is the primary focus of my research, I pieced together a definition that, from my perspective, is the closest to the specific issue: Postmodernism, influenced by the second world war and dated from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, was (not only) a literary movement that comes as a counter-reaction to modernism or, on the contrary, it might be perceived that modernism “has continued into a new phase”<sup>19</sup> characterized by its evolution into postmodernism. In other words, we have two opposing points of view concerning the evolution after modernism. Moreover, there are overarching themes and characteristics that are commonly associated with the movement. Postmodernism is marked by a departure from traditional notions of absolute truth and objective reality. Due to its down-to-earth view it resisted modernist enthusiasm and a hope for a better tomorrow and faced life via realistic spectacles. It celebrates pluralism, hybridity, and intertextuality, blurring

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<sup>17</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 3. *Internet Archive*. Web. 27 March. 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. 2nd ed., e-book. Taylor & Francis e-Library 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Baldick, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 175.

the boundaries between high and low culture, and often embracing popular culture as a legitimate form of artistic discourse.

Regarding postmodernist literature, irony and satire came into use and became useful instruments as a way to cope with the melancholic mood. A sombre mood was projected into literature and so-called anti-novel came into existence, moreover, “the typical protagonist has become not a hero but an anti-hero.”<sup>20</sup> There is no doubt that postmodernism evinces signs of relativism, but also nihilism and apathy.

## **4.4 Characteristic Features of Postmodern Narrative**

### **4.4.1 Intertextuality**

When there could be spotted various relations among texts, it is called intertextuality. It is viewed as “the network of relations between various kinds of text, though it is important to emphasize that the network involves relations of difference as well as similarity”<sup>21</sup>, or to put it simply the term refers to the presence of a text A in a text B.

In its broader sense, intertextuality can be applied not only to the literary text, but to other notable events, personas, art, and other features. Therefore, when a literary work, a person, or basically whatever else a reader knows from their prior experience, appears in the novel, we can identify it as the occurrence of intertextuality.

### **4.4.2 Polyphony**

This term in literature came into knowledge thanks to the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. According to him, the polyphony is the main characteristic of a novel and expresses the diversity of voices and perspectives. Polyphony can be demonstrated by different characters, narrators, and even genres across literary work. As an example, I would mention the novel *Hotel World* by Ali Smith, where the event of a fatal accident is narrated by several unrelated characters. Bakhtin believes polyphony is the key feature of the novel as it ensures to give a reader multiple perspectives by characters coming from various backgrounds, and holding different views, beliefs, and values.

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<sup>20</sup> Holman and Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 390.

<sup>21</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan ed., *Narrative across Media* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 59.

### 4.4.3 Temporal Disorder

The temporal disorder is a disruption of the chronological sequence of the narrated story which causes the violation of the traditional flow of time. In postmodern fiction, the temporal disorder is expressed in a variety of forms. Barry Lewis in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* mentions some of these forms by which the temporal disorder is achieved and presents them in certain literary works. Lewis also mentions the terminology connected to temporal disorder, he uses the terms *kairos* and *chronos*: “Postmodernist fiction did not just disrupt the past, but corrupted the present too. It disordered the linear coherence of narrative by wrapping the sense of significant time, *kairos*, or the dull passing of ordinary time, *chronos*.”<sup>22</sup>

This technique is used in order to create a sense of disorientation or confusion for the reader. The passages from either the past or the future interrupt the natural chronological flow of the story and have the task of influencing the present or giving some necessary information reader needs to comprehend the story.

What comes hand in hand with a temporal disorder is a fragmentation of the story. Fragmentation refers to a structure that is not constructed in chronological order. It usually involves breaking up the narrative into smaller pieces that are presented in a non-linear order. Fragmentation can create a sense of disorientation and uncertainty for the reader.

### 4.4.4 Magic Realism

To put it simply, magic realism stands for the appearance of supernatural or fantastic elements in the ordinary or mundane. In other words, and according to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, magic realism stands for “a style of modern fiction in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and the inexplicable, and in which elements of dream, fairy story, or mythology combine with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrence.”<sup>23</sup>

One of the key features of magic realism is the blurring of boundaries between the ordinary and extraordinary as the characters of the narrative usually can not distinguish whether the element of magic realism is real or whether they project the element in their minds for whatever reason.

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<sup>22</sup> Stuart Sim, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, Oxford: Routledge, 2011. PDF.

<sup>23</sup> Birch ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 626.

## 4.5 Metamodernism

There is no doubt that there must be another movement that would take over the fire torch of postmodernism. As Searle says: “Postmodernism is dead and something altogether weirder has taken its place.”<sup>24</sup> What is the following era like? It is definitely something persistently evolving and it requires further exploration.

The description of the fundamental principles of modernism and postmodernism can help us to understand the notion of metamodernism. Metamodern as a term is a quite recent concept. Even though the term was coined in the 80s, its usage did not come in handy until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Vermeulen and Akker, who are associated with popularization of the term, characterize metamodernism as “the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and markedly postmodern detachment.”<sup>25</sup> One may perceive metamodernism as a binary opposition between modernism and postmodernism, i.e. binary opposition between modernist enthusiasm and postmodernist irony, hope and melancholy, unity and plurality, science and information, urban and suburban, empathy and apathy, naïveté and knowingness.

In my view, I conceive metamodernism as an imaginary creature standing on a bridge and running from one side of the bridge to another, assuming the bank at the one end of the bridge represents modernism and the bank on the other side of the bridge represents postmodernism. Another is a comparison to “a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles.”<sup>26</sup> by current metamodernist promoters Vermeulen and Akker.

According to Vermeulen and Akker and their perception of metamodern sensibility, its definition should not be taken as a strict dogma, they rather suggest an open definition of metamodern sensibility on the alert for discussion. They also explain the origins of the metamodern in the term of arts concluding that nowadays art has come to the stage where there is no convenient descriptive vocabulary for it.

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<sup>24</sup> Adrian Searle, “Altermodern review: ‘The richest and most generous Tate Triennial yet’” *The Guardian*, February 3, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/02/altermodern-tate-triennial>

<sup>25</sup> Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, “Notes on metamodernism,” *Journal of AESTHETICS & CULTURE*, 2:1, 5677, DOI: 10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

The origin of the new phase following postmodernism is also assigned to the series of events and world crises that occurred in a short period. Timotheus Vermeulen mentions geological, political, financial, and ecological shifts and the feelings that the world is unsustainable, and people are bored with it. He also mentions the rapid development of social media, the Internet, and technology in general.

Regarding social media, there is no doubt that people live in a diverse world they have never lived in before. Social media and digital development in general, seem to be affecting all areas of our daily lives. Moreover, in the last two years, thanks to the pandemic, society has had an opportunity to rely on social media and the Internet completely, concerning their work, social and personal life, and also in most cases as the only source of information from the outer world. Thanks to digitalization, the Internet, and social media, one can work from home, comment on any topics they wish, attend a conference, sign a petition, buy a grocery that will be delivered to one's door, send flowers to one's loved ones, book summer holiday, have a conversation with relatives living at the other side of the world. Essentially, nowadays it is possible to live one's life without crossing the threshold. Nevertheless, the quality and benefits of such manners remain questionable. There is no doubt, social media, the Internet, and digitalization in general have affected today's world more than enough and it has changed ways of life across the planet.

To provide a better understanding of modern, postmodern, and metamodern waves with connection to digitalization and social media, I would like to refer to the conception by Anna-Laure Le Cunff, a French educator and researcher, whose explanation I find highly favourable. Le Cunff associates modernism with the invention of the radio waves and the expansion of telecommunication, postmodernism arrives with the television era and metamodernism comes hand in hand with the internet and social media.<sup>27</sup>

A would also like to refer to Le Cunff's very brief and intelligible summary of metamodernism which is published on her website as well: "To summarise, we went from modernism—"Make it new!" Let's shape History!—to postmodernism—everything

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<sup>27</sup> Anna-Laure Le Cunff. "An Introduction to Metamodernism: the Cultural Philosophy of the Digital Age." NessLabs. Last modified December 12, 2019. <https://nesslabs.com/metamodernism>

sucks! Nothing really matters!– to metamodernism: maybe things are not thus black-and-white? Maybe there’s a middle ground?”<sup>28</sup>

#### **4.5.1 Metamodernism and Metamodern Sensibility**

In the preceding paragraphs, I attempted to explain the concept of metamodernism, its main principles, and its origins. Metamodernism refers to developments in recent culture and can be applied to a wide range of areas such as philosophy, politics, architecture, arts, music, fashion, literature, etc. As one might conclude, metamodernism denotes an era or developments in general. Whereas, the term metamodern sensibility is used in a narrow sense and the term refers to the ability to perceive metamodern characteristics. In other words, when we talk about metamodern sensibility we talk about the skill of perception of metamodernism in art, more precisely in literature.

I see metamodernism as a successor of postmodernism, nevertheless not as a reaction against it, but rather as its continuation that is still in a process of development. In other words, metamodernism is not just a distant cousin of postmodernism, but more like a close sibling that inherited postmodern distinctive characteristics and features, presenting them as its own and experimenting with them. As the postmodern marathon has reached its peak and now it is time for metamodernism to carry the torch forward.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## 5. Ali Smith

Born in the Scottish Highlands to a working-class family, Ali Smith, a contemporary Scottish female writer “whose work has attracted a slow but steady range of critical responses”<sup>29</sup>, dedicated her literary career to writing fiction, mainly novels and short stories. Ali started her literary career during her studies at the University of Aberdeen, where she studied English language and literature, and won praise for her poetic skills. Thereafter, she composed several plays while studying Ph.D. program at the University of Cambridge. As a consequence of her incipient fondness for writing, she did not manage to finish her doctorate studies.

Despite the status of her hometown Inverness to be one of the 10 happiest places in Scotland, Ali suffered from emotional stress that developed into chronic fatigue syndrome, which forced her to call a time-out from her lecturing at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow and became a full-time writer. At first, she devoted herself to writing short stories and publish several short story collections so far. Among Smith’s well-known short story collections belong *Free Love and Other Stories* (1995), *Other Stories and Other Stories* (1999), and *The Whole Story and Other Stories* (2003) to name just a few. Talking about Ali Smith’s literary works, one must not forget her novels. Starting with publishing *Like*

Ali Smith together with other “outstanding contemporary practitioners”<sup>30</sup> such as Muriel Spark, Janice Galloway, and Iain Crichton Smith to mention but a few shaped the Scottish short story during the last decades into its nowadays form as the “Scottish short story writing is a distinguished genre”<sup>31</sup> in Scottish literature.

Ali Smith depicts the contemporary issues of today’s society, particularly in Britain. Her recent literary contribution is the so-called *Seasonal Quartet*, which consists of four novels: *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), *Spring* (2019), and *Summer* (2020). Shortly after the *Seasonal Quartet*, Ali published her latest novel so far, which was released last year called *Companion Piece* (2022).

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<sup>29</sup> Nick Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 89.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Gifford et al., eds., *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2002), 978.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



## 5.1 Writing Style of Ali Smith

As mentioned above, Ali Smith contributed to the Scottish literary canon, mainly through her short stories and novels. Her writing style is very unique and characteristic as I find it problematic to describe it in my own words and at the same time to be comprehensible for a reader unacquainted with this author.

### 5.1.1 Figurative Language

The first thing a reader might notice while reading Smith's narrative fiction is the utilization of figurative language and playfulness with the words, phrases, idioms, capitalization, etc. to add a sort of complex humor to a particular statement or a situation. Across Smith's literary work, a reader will run into language puns and funny anagrams.

As an illustration of this, I provide two examples from her novel *Hotel World*. The writer uses the idiom "the penny drops" concerning the character named Penny and captures Penny's moment of understanding in her mind. One more anagram concerning the name of a character can be found within the narrative part of a character named Else, the homeless woman when she is talking to herself in her head: "I don't know what, Else, to do. I don't know who, Else, to speak to."<sup>32</sup>

Smith's narratives brim with homophonic puns. I provide a witty example taken from *The Accidental*. At the university where the character of Mike works, it is a well-known fact that he is a womaniser and several female students visit his office more often which is adequate. Smith calls his office "the fuckulty office."<sup>33</sup>

### 5.1.2 References

In her work, Ali Smith refers to a great deal of other remarkable literary works, authors, movies, and even notable philosophers. Therefore, Ali Smith's narratives are undoubtedly intertextual due to references, that make the narrative more believable and real. Her favorite literary works she refers across her work are the ones by Charles Dickens. Nevertheless, there are many more references to classic literary works throughout her writing, such as *Wuthering Heights*, and *Pygmalion*, to name just a few.

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<sup>32</sup> Ali Smith, *Hotel World* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002), 53.

<sup>33</sup> Ali Smith, *The Accidental* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006), 262.

### 5.1.3 Themes

Ali Smith offers a diverse variety of themes she composes into her work. The key themes Smith works with are the loss of a close person, family relationships, adultery, sexual identity, death, social relationships and their struggles, outcasts and their integration, and misunderstanding between younger and older generations.

Even though Ali Smith has never confessed her lesbian coming out, the repetitive choice of the themes of the love between two women in her both novels and short stories suggests that the subject matter is more than personal to her. Ali Smith explores characters' sexual identities from their teenage years. As an example, I provide the situation of the main character from the novel *Hotel World* Sara Wimbly, who at a young age explores her sexual orientation. Sara loses her head over a girl who works in a watch shop and starts to think about her as a follow-up to catching a glimpse of her sister's naked body: "I had been looking. I had been gazing, without even realizing, at the shape of her body, at her stomach and the place where her pants covered her, and I had been thinking about what the girl in the watch shop's body would look like if it didn't have any clothes on it. It was the first time I had ever, ever thought such a thing, about anyone and I felt shame in my gut and spreading all up and down my body."<sup>34</sup>

The short story "Free Love", which gives its name to the first published collection of short stories named *Free Love and Other Stories* (1995), depicts a teenage girl's first sexual experience with a prostitute in Amsterdam as compensation for her platonic crush – her best friend Jackie. The protagonist's feelings are being suppressed as she feels ashamed of her sexual orientation. She confesses: "I'd had these thoughts for years and they were getting harder and harder to keep silent about. I didn't really have a choice."<sup>35</sup> The girl discovers opportunities the city offers as she is sure about her best friend's feelings for her are unreciprocated. She is also afraid the reveal of her affection might ruin the friendship.

Smith supports awareness of homosexuality and provides a significant space in her fiction for this theme.

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<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Hotel World*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ali Smith, *Free Love and Other Stories* (London: Virago Press, 1995), 5.

#### **5.1.4 Punctuation**

Smith overtly ignores the conventional rules of punctuation, especially in direct speech. She does not apply quotation marks to differentiate the direct speech from the indirect speech, and therefore, the readers might find this writing style to be incoherent and even disturbing. On the other hand, omitting punctuation does not disturb the natural flow of the narrative and keeps a reader involved.

### **5.2 The *Seasonal Quartet***

The Seasonal Quartet is a collection of four contemporary novels (*Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*) by Ali Smith. Named after the seasons of the year, they usually take place during a particular season and deal with numerous political and social themes. The novels are slightly interconnected by one of the characters, however, there is no need to read the novels in order as each of them tells an independent story and each can be read on its own. Nevertheless, I should point out the fact that for reading the last novel of the quartet *Summer*, I would strongly recommend knowledge of previous volumes, as in *Summer*, all the pieces from previous novels start to make sense. Each novel concentrates on various current political or social issues and real-world events coming from Brexit and the immigration crisis to the pandemic of COVID-19. The novels do not emphasize the set of events and actions but rather depict current social and political moods. In other words, the novels are not action-driven (except for *Spring* and more or less of *Summer*, where the actions are an essential part of the novel) but rather concentrate on the specific atmosphere and its credible depiction.

## 6. *Autumn*

The *Autumn* (2016) depicts the friendship of a 32-year-old Elisabeth Demand, a semi-employed junior Art History lecturer at a university in London, and her decades-older companion Daniel Gluck. Their lifelong friendship is depicted throughout the story with extracts from her childhood when she met Daniel, who lived next door. Elisabeth and Daniel start to spend time together and became inseparable friends. Daniel, with his adult approach, fills the empty space of Elisabeth's absent father. Daniel and Elisabeth seem to be platonically in love with each other as neither Daniel nor Elisabeth has love partners. Throughout the book, a reader is learning about the relationship between the two main characters, their experience, and their common memories.

The present-day timeline takes place at The Maltings Care Providers plc, where 101-year-old Daniel has been in a coma for the past few weeks. Elisabeth visits him regularly, talks to him and reads him a book. She chose to read novels such as *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Brave New World*, or *Metamorphoses*. These novels are not picked by coincidence. All of them describe themes and topics which help the author to describe current political and societal mood in post-Brexit Britain. *A Tale of Two Cities* depicts an interaction between individuals and society, revolution and political unrest, *Brave New World* reflects on a dystopian future and the control exerted by the government and technology over individual freedom, and *Metamorphoses* represents a transformation of an individual resulting in alienation and isolation of the main character. The main themes of aforementioned novels reflects Smith's stance towards the current affairs and complete the atmosphere of *Autumn*. Elisabeth's care of Daniel is undisputed as she visits the care home frequently.

*Autumn* is composed of the present-day storyline and it is interspersed with fragments from Elisabeth's childhood which takes the reader back to the early nineties and describes the story of how she met Daniel. As a 8-year-old school girl, she was given homework to interview a neighbour. Despite her mother's concerns, Elisabeth starts to forge friendship with the old man and keep him company. It is essential to emphasize that Elisabeth was quite mature for her age and the relationship between her and Daniel wasn't filial (nevertheless Daniel could be perceived as a substitution of Elisabeth's absent father), but rather more sophisticated, as if it was a friendship

between two wise and mutually respecting individuals. Beside Daniel, Elisabeth had the opportunity to explore and deepen her intellectual and artistic talent. Daniel introduced Elisabeth the world of art, which helped her to grow and perhaps precisely because of that, she chose the career as an Art History lecturer at a university in London. Daniel was interested in art and especially in artist Pauline Boty. Describing her collages ranked among their favourite pastime, just as a question: “What you reading?”<sup>36</sup>

The life of Elisabeth Demand is accompanied by the presence of her mother. Elisabeth’s mother is depicted as a strong and independent woman who is fiercely dedicated to her principles and beliefs. She is described as feminist and activist, actively engaged in political causes and social justice issues. Throughout the novel, Elisabeth reminisces about her childhood experiences. Even as a kid, she was resistant and did not take her mother as an authority or a role model. Despite the familial relation between Elisabeth and her mother, their mutual relationship is marked by a sense of distance and estrangement due to their divergent worldview and life choices. Elisabeth’s mother often struggles to fully understand her daughter’s unconventional approach to life.

## **6.1 Analysis of *Autumn***

### **6.1.1 Symbolism**

The piece of art Elisabeth decides to write her dissertation about is a painting called “Scandal 63” by Pauline Boty. The painting portrays Christine Keeler and it “was last seen in the year it was painted”.<sup>37</sup> Christine Keeler was a British model who was politically active and “contributed to the collapse of the Government of Harold Harold Macmillan”<sup>38</sup> Just as the painting “Scandal 63” remains hidden, Smith calls for the unrevealed justice regarding the results of the 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum.

As Smith published in her article about Boty, she “filled her work with images of now: the Cuban missile crisis, Vietnam, US civil right abuses, press images of

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<sup>36</sup> Ali Smith, *Autumn* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), 68.

<sup>37</sup> Robin Stummer, “Mystery of missing art by Pauline Boty,” *The Guardian*, April 27, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/apr/27/pauline-boty-hunt-lost-art>

<sup>38</sup> M. Ray, “Christine Keeler.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 18, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Christine-Keeler>.

Christine Keeler.”<sup>39</sup> and does not feel afraid on commenting on topics she finds relevant and significant. Thanks to Boty’s example, the character of Elisabeth is ready to speak her opinions through art and comment on the political scene. The character of Pauline Boty plays a significant role in the novel as a symbol of artistic and social rebellion and the representation of the role of women in public affairs.

Another recurring element in the novel is Elisabeth’s passport. Throughout the story, she makes efforts to gain a new one. The passport refers to one’s identity, and how the borders and boundaries shape one’s identity and also opinions. Elisabeth herself tries to find her own identity in a politically torn British society.

Symbolism can be easily spotted even in the name of the book itself. Autumn signifies a period of change from one season to another. Moreover, the period of transition from the end of summer to the beginning of winter is characterized by cold, dark, and gloomy weather, and similar is the author’s opinion on the current political situation related to Brexit. Smith expresses her skepticism about the contemporary situation and she is incapable of seeing a bright future.

### **6.1.2 Flashback Technique**

The novel consists of unnamed chapters that mingle the present with the past. The main storyline is interrupted by extracts from Elisabeth’s childhood. There is no pattern in the switching between past and present (i.e. a chapter from the present is always followed by a chapter from the past and the other way round), nevertheless, the alternation of time perspectives accompanies a reader throughout the whole story. The flashbacks from Elisabeth’s childhood are easily recognizable as usually, the chapter introduces the exact time details of the described events, including Elisabeth’s age: “It was another Friday in the October holidays in 1995. Elisabeth was eleven years old.”<sup>40</sup> or “It was a sunny Friday evening more than a decade ago, in the spring of 2004. Elisabeth was nearly twenty.”<sup>41</sup> The flashbacks are ordered chronologically from the oldest to the most recent, however, there is one exception. There is one flashback excerpt where is Elisabeth eleven years old inserted between the parts where Elisabeth is sixteen and eighteen years old.

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<sup>39</sup> Ali Smith, “Ali Smith on the prime of pop artist Pauline Boty,” *The Guardian*, October 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/22/ali-smith-the-prime-of-pauline-boty>

<sup>40</sup> Ali Smith, *Autumn* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), 67.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 223.

One of the flashbacks is Elisabeth's school project in which Elisabeth was supposed to interview a neighbour. Her mother found bothering their neighbour inappropriate and force Elisabeth to reconstruct the possible answers. The project is written in the style of a nine-year-old girl and gives the impression that the text is more authentic and plausible. Here is a short extract from Elisabeth's project to demonstrate its plausibility:

Here are the questions I would ask him  
1 what is it like to have new neighbours  
2 what is it like to be a neighbour  
3 what is it like to be meant to be old but not to be  
4 why his house is full of pictures why they are not like the pictures we have in our house and lastly  
5 why there is music playing whenever you walk close to the front door of our next door neighbour.<sup>42</sup>

### 6.1.3 Intertextuality

The beginning of the novel starts with the quote "It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times"<sup>43</sup> which correlates with the famous Charles Dickens's line "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."<sup>44</sup> from the opening line of *A Tale of Two Cities*. While Dickens characterizes the then period of the French Revolution as a period of prosperity, progress, and optimism on the one hand but also a period of poverty and despair on the other, Smith expresses her desperate attitude and does not expect anything pleasant to happen. The book *A Tale of Two Cities* itself appears in the novel as Elisabeth is reading it to Daniel while he is asleep. The extracts from the book are embodied in the *Autumn*.

When the two main characters (Daniel and Elisabeth) have long conversations mainly about nature and art, they mention several times Pauline Boty, whom I mentioned above in the subchapter concentrating on the symbolism of the novel. Pauline Boty was the main figure of the 1960s British pop culture. The presence of a real character (Pauline Boty) and a real culture movement (British pop art movement) in fiction serve as examples of intertextuality.

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<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Autumn*, 231-232.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Dickens Charles, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Harper Press, 2010), 3.

I mentioned just a few examples of intertextuality in *Autumn*, nevertheless, there are significantly more examples across the book including literary works, films, music, and well-known characters.

#### **6.1.4 Polyphony**

Fragmentation of the book is one of the cases where we can find polyphony. The book consists of three parts which are indicated simply by a number (1, 2, and 3) and each of the parts consists of several unnamed chapters. The very first line of new chapters starts at the middle of a page and the first sentence is in bold. The structure described above is the case for other novels from the *Seasonal Quartet*. The chapters that follow the main storyline are accompanied by flashback chapters that deal with previous events from Elisabeth's past at various points in the past. This fragmentation of the book enables a reader to travel back in time and see Elisabeth as a child and teenager, her development, and find out certain crucial moments that caused her long-time admiration for Daniel.

The book is narrated from the point of view of a covert heterodiegetic omniscient narrator who comments on what is happening and has access to the thoughts of the characters and comments. He guides the reader throughout the story and describes the characters' opinions and feelings. The narrator does not concentrate only on the main character of Elisabeth but also mediates Daniel's perception: "The old man (Daniel) opens his eyes to find he can't open his eyes. He seems to be shut inside something remarkably like the trunk of a Scots pine. At least it smells like a pine."<sup>45</sup> The narrator comments on what is happening and at the same time describes what Daniel feels – he can not open his eyes and he smells pine.

Moreover, the novel presents contradictory stances toward current issues. The British European Union Referendum of 2016 is accompanied throughout the story. Smith expresses her personal view on this through the character of Elisabeth, nevertheless, she did not forget to depict the complex emotions and opinions that Brexit has evoked. In *Autumn*, the deep divisions and tension that have arisen in British society over the issue are depicted. The conflict of opinions between two opposite sides can be spotted in the scene where Elisabeth receives her new passport and her mother does not fancy the visual side of the cover page of it: "Her mother points to the words European

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<sup>45</sup> Smith, *Autumn*, 89.



Union at the top of the cover of the passport and makes a sad face. Then she flicks through it. What are all these drawings? She says. This passport has been illustrated like a ladybird book. A Ladybird book on acid, Elisabeth says. I don't want a new passport if it's going to look like this, her mother says."<sup>46</sup>

## **6.2 Metamodernism in *Autumn***

In my analysis of the novel *Autumn*, I have presented various features of both modernism and postmodernism such as symbolism, flashback technique, intertextuality and polyphony. Therefore, the novel might be ranked among metamodern novels as the modern and postmodern features mingle across the novel. Apart from that, it has become apparent that there are other elements and features inherent to metamodernism within the novel.

Smith points out current public events and issues. The novel deals with various contemporary issues such as Brexit above all. She describes the riven atmosphere after the EU referendum in 2016. Other themes she mentions are immigration crisis or the socio-political climate of the current era. These themes resonate with the metamodernist conception for grappling with the complexities of the present era.

Smith (as usual) employs a nonlinear (or fragmented) structure, weaving together multiple timelines and perspectives. In this case two interconnected storylines are told and fragments from the characters' past are presented. The playful narrative structure is not only characteristic for the author's own style but also reflective of the metamodern narrative.

To sum up, *Autumn* exhibits many characteristics that contribute to its classification as a metamodern novel, including its narrative experimentation, engagement with contemporary issues, intertextuality, and many others and therefore, I believe that *Autumn* belongs to a metamodern literary canon.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 196.

## 7. *Winter*

The *Winter* (2017) is the second sequel of Smith's *Seasonal Quartet*. The novel is set in a contemporary England, Cornwall, and it takes readers to winter time, more specifically a Christmas time. Although someone could be expecting a cosy Christmas story with flaming fireplace and welcoming family atmosphere, it is not the case for this novel. The story revolves around dysfunctional family gathering where estranged sisters (Sophia and Iris) unexpectedly reunite and the old wrongs come to the surface. The atmosphere captures complexities of human relationships and personality differences between siblings.

The novel follows two interconnected storylines. The first line concentrates on a young man Arthur, who is rather living his online life on his blog wittily called "Art in Nature" and concentrates on Arthur's findings regarding nature. Arthur prefers his online world and several followers more than a real presence. Art was dumped by his girlfriend Charlotte, and therefore he hires a girl named Lux to pretend to be his ex-girlfriend Charlotte as he promised his mother to take his girlfriend home for Christmas. The story is accompanied by the question of Art's father's identity as Art does not remember his father and Sophia does not want to talk about him. The end of the book reveals that Art's father is not Godfrey Gable, as a reader might guess from the beginning of the book, but a mysterious older man whose identity is unknown. During the Christmas family meeting, Sophia, Arthur's mother, confessed the secret about Art's biological father to Charlotte under the belief that the man must be dead by now. At this point, a reader might observe a correlation among characters from previous novel as the mysterious man resembles with the character of Daniel Gluck from *Autumn*. Moreover, there was mentioned a postcard in *Autumn*, which Daniel bought for a woman named Sophie. There is also noted that Daniel wanted her to love him, but she did not and neither did he. On the other hand, in *Winter*, Sophia admitted that the man was the love of her life.

The second storyline depicts a relationship and reunite of middle-aged sisters with complicated history and emotional detachment. Despite being siblings, after unresolved conflicts and divergent life paths, they became alienated. Sophia, the younger sister, is portrayed as pragmatic and skeptical, while Iris, the older sister, is depicted as idealistic and eccentric. The novel recounts fragments from Sophia and Iris'

childhood and depicts Sophia as oversensitive (the sad story Laika, the space dog was really hard on her) and Iris as an easygoing, all-knowing, even sassy. Iris' recklessness has converted into concern about global problems and she became an environmental activist, volunteering in world missions in affected areas.

Despite their differences, Sophia and Iris share an enduring sisterly love and understanding for one another. Even though they have dissimilar personalities and views on certain problems, they rediscover familial ties and the importance of forgiveness. The sisters finally come to understand each other in new ways, showing more respect and acceptance to each other.

## **7.1 Analysis of *Winter***

### **7.1.1 Symbolism**

Of the two sisters, Sophia Cleves was always considered to be the responsible and rational one. Her sister Iris called her "Philo". Sophia always thought it is because the "philo" evokes to be affixed with "sophia" creating philosophia. The chosen name for Sophia refers to her personality, if one takes into consideration that the Greek origin of the name Sophia means "wisdom" and female knowledge. Later on, Iris confessed that her intention of calling her sister "Philo" was so different, and what she was thinking was phyllo as dough meant for baking baklava and other Greek pastry. Nevertheless, I believe Iris did not want to humiliate her sister but rather point out her sister's fragility.

The symbolism is hidden even in Sophia's last name - Cleves. Smith again plays with the homophony and by choosing this particular last name, which has a similar pronunciation to the word "cleave" which can mean both to separate or to adhere closely, she refers to Sophia's aloof behaviour. The ambiguity of the meaning of Sophia's last name could reflect the duality that she experiences in her relationships and her own identity.

The character of Lux symbolizes a "light" that is helping to smooth out broken family relationships. Lux's behavior is kind and understanding. It looks like she tries to fit into the family which it looks like she is missing. One could assume that Lux misses the feeling of belonging somewhere and tries to find a place where she could feel comfortable and welcomed.

As with *Autumn*, symbolism is carried in the name of the novel in *Winter*. Winter is a powerful symbol and reflects a period of frozen time and the time of hibernation. Also, winter

As winter symbolizes the end of the year and the upcoming start of something new, it is the time of recalling memories and evaluations of the past year. In the book, there are many scenes where characters recall long-ago memories. Nevertheless, sometimes characters can not agree on specific issues and therefore it is up to the reader to decide which character to believe or not. The recurrent conflict between Sophia and Iris is presented several times across the story and it is concerned with whether Artur lived with his aunt Iris when he was a child or not. Iris is convinced that she spent some time with Artur when he was a child, but Sophia says the very opposite:

It's not where we lived, though. That was before your time. You and I lived in Newlyn. We used to visit the pit they dug to commemorate the miners who died, the place with the grassy seats.

Remember?

I don't, he says.

Never mind. I do, Iris says.

As soon as Iris goes through to the kitchen his mother leans forward.

You never lived with her, Arthur. He never lived with her, Charlotte.

He lived with my father for a bit, when he was pre-school and I was regularly out of the country. But never with her.<sup>47</sup>

The end of the year is associated with Christmas gatherings that are not always pleasant and it often happens that old grievances come to the surface and it is not different with the Cleves family.

### **7.1.2 Stream of Consciousness**

As mentioned earlier, Ali Smith is fond of applying a stream-of-consciousness method in her work. She let the narrator or the characters speak out through their uncontrolled stream of their inner thoughts. I provide an example of stream of consciousness taken from the beginning of the book where Sophia contemplates the embodied head that shows up: “The head settled next to the fruitbowl, apples, lemons. It made her table look like an art joke, an installation, or a painting by the artist Magritte,

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<sup>47</sup> Ali Smith, *Winter* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2017), 191.

This Isn't a Head; no, like Dalí, or the De Chirico heads, but funny, like Duchamp who put the moustache on the Mona Lisa, even something like a tabletop still life by Cézanne whom she'd always found on the one hand unsettling and on the other refreshing given that he reveals, though it's hard to believe, that things like apples and oranges can be blues and purples as well, colours you would never have believed they had in them."<sup>48</sup>

### 7.1.3 Intertextuality

The book starts with the quote: "God was dead: to begin with"<sup>49</sup> which adverts to Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol* where a reader can spot a similar line saying "Marley was dead, to begin with"<sup>50</sup>. Together with the title *Winter*, the very first line of the book reveals that the forthcoming story is going to be set in the winter time, most specifically during Christmas time, as *The Christmas Carol* recounts a world-famous Christmas narrative as well. As mentioned in the previous chapter "Writing Style of Ali Smith", Smith is fond of using references across her work and this is the perfect example of this feature. Moreover, references by Charles Dickens are, in my opinion, one of the most used in Smith's literary work.

Ali Smith got inspired by Dickens not even by the introductory lines. The character of Sophia bears a resemblance to one of the characters from *Christmas Carol* by Dickens — Scrooge. These two characters resemble in many ways and have a lot in common. They are both initially characterized as solitary, cynical, and detached individuals who are estranged from their families and happy with their own company. Both are haunted by their past and past memories they have suppressed. Both live alone in huge houses with plenty of room for potential guests or family members, but none of them are visited and hence the room stays unoccupied. Both of them have visions of magical creature that visits them. Sophia's vision of a disembodied head strikingly resembles Scrooge's vision of the Ghost of Christmas Present as both are described as having a childlike face and look transparent and ethereal. On her journey of development, Sophia begins to see the world in new ways. Due to interactions with the people she meets and her growing interest in art, Sophia learns to overcome her emotional barriers and embrace the beauty of the world around her. A similar

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<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Winter*, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Dickens Charles, *A Christmas Carol and Other Stories* (London: Dead and Son, 1960), 7.

development is presented in the case of Scrooge. Thanks to the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come, he realizes his bitterness and learns to see the beauty of the world.

There are also lots of other figures, artists, literary works, films, and political and cultural events mentioned across the whole book, for instance, Charlie Chaplin, John Keats, Barbara Hepworth, and many others.

#### **7.1.4 Polyphony**

The novel *Winter* is, just like *Autumn*, narrated by an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator. The omniscient function of the narrator exposes readers to the characters' states of mind. The characters are portrayed in a fragmented way with their identities and histories revealed gradually throughout the series of overlapping stories. In this novel, the main focus is concentrated on the present and past of Sophia and Iris. The present storyline is interrupted by extracts from the past which depict the sisters' bygone events they went through. The fragmented projection of characters presents readers with various perspectives and helps them to understand the characters' actions and behaviour.

Polyphonic is one of the characters too. Lux (a girl who is paid by Artur to pretend to be his girlfriend) is in fact endowed with two identities. The first one is an erudite Croatian immigrant girl, and the other one is Artur's pretended girlfriend Charlotte. It is worth noting, the two identities are blended, and after all, Lux is being herself, just "covered" under the name of Charlotte.

The polyphony is also expressed by different narrative techniques Smith uses. From the traditional narrative technique, she switches to a form of writing, which looks like this:

My mother never did any such thing. (His mother.)

I know she did. I'm the one who helped her work out the percentage every year. (His aunt.)

Liar. (His mother.)

Self-deceiver. (His aunt.)

The idea that only her life counts, only her life makes a difference in the world. (His mother.)

The idea that there might be a world that's not as she perceives it. (His aunt.)

Deluded. (His mother.)

Deluded all right. (His aunt.)

Mad. (His mother.)

Speak for yourself (His aunt.)

Mythologizer. (His mother.)

I'm not the person here making stuff up about the world. (His aunt.)

Selfish. (His mother.)

Sophist. (His aunt.)

Solipsist. (His mother)

Swotty little show-off. (His aunt.)<sup>51</sup>

This change in narrative enables to bring a different type of energy, keeps the reader interested, and makes clear divisions of who is speaking at the moment.

Apart from a dramatic form of writing, Smith also projects various forms of several written texts to mediate the actual content to a reader. For instance, there are extracts from text messages between Artur and his aunt Iris:

“Yesterday Iris texted him to tell him the other meaning of brimstone.

*Dear Neph, did u ever check out or cm across the fire-and-forget function of the so-called Brimstone, I mean air-launched ground attack missile kind. Not very bttrfly eh! If \*it\* flaps wings then whole other bttrfly effect for sure x Ire*

Today she is unexpectedly comforting. *Dear Neph, she says, or not sounding much like urself on twit :-\$. So tell me now that u know persnly : are we at mercy of tchnology or is tchnology at mercy of us? X Ire*”<sup>52</sup>

The alternation of different narrative techniques and forms of writing mixing with an informal style of language contributes to the polyphony of the novel.

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Winter*, 213-214.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 50-51.

In the extract demonstrating the dramatic form of writing above, one can also spot the point of view from which the story is narrated at the moment by the naming of the characters in the brackets. In this passage the story is seen from Artur's point of view as the speaking characters are not called Iris and Sophia but "his aunt" and "his mother". The whole book is divided into several sections, each of which is further divided into smaller fragments that shift between different characters and narrative styles. The fragmentation of the book creates a complex and polyphonic narrative that incorporates a wide range of perspectives and voices. Moreover, a reader can see the story through the eyes of several characters.

### **7.1.5 Magic Realism**

The most distinct element that falls into the classification of magic realism in the novel is undoubtedly the disembodied head in Sophia's vision. The disembodied head "floating by itself in mid air"<sup>53</sup> blurs the line between imagination and reality and stands as a fantastical element to the story. Sophia herself hesitates whether the floating head is an element of her imagination or whether she sees it for real and that is the reason she decides to visit an optician to check her eyesight. The optician assures Sophia her eyes are in perfect shape and there is nothing she could be worried about. Sophia then concludes that the disembodied head is a product of her imagination, however, she is not concerned as she finds the head "sweet, and bashful in its ceremoniousness"<sup>54</sup>

To sum up, *Winter* undoubtedly carries signs of both modernism and postmodernism and therefore we can identify this novel as metamodern. Moreover, the two main characters Iris and Sophia represent the counter-example of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. The optimistic Iris on the one end and always pessimistic Sophia on the other one. These two opinions correlate with each other, the same as the opposite poles of modernism and postmodernism.

## **7.2. Metamodernism in *Winter***

In the previous chapter I examined modern and postmodern features occurring in *Winter*, such as symbolism, stream of consciousness, intertextuality, polyphony and

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, *Winter*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 9.



magic realism. In addition to that, it has become evident that the novel contains other elements and characteristics that are intrinsic to metamodernism.

The novel delves into timeless topics, with a particular focus on the dynamics of family relations. The exploration of familial bonds remains crucial and topical issue as by examining this, one can spot the human experience across generations and what is more,

Another current affair that is pictured in the novel is the after-Brexit unstable time for immigrants. The main representative of this is the character of Lux, who comes from Croatia and after EU referendum she is worried about her future plans. She finds herself in the unpleasant situation shared by thousands of other immigrants living and working in Great Britain, awaiting the verdict that will ascertain her rightfulness to remain or necessitate her deportation back to her home country. By deciding one of the characters to be immigrant, Smith portrays the authentic atmosphere and the world where nothing remains certain and circumstances can shift in a snap.

Another current affair Smith pays attention to is the one of immigration crisis. One of the main characters, Iris, is an environmental activist and volunteers in missions in Greece so as to help immigrants from Lybia and other war-affected countries. Iris describes her experience in order to arouse her sister's awareness of these problems.

By synthesizing elements from both modernism and postmodernism while also exhibiting distinct metamodern characteristics, *Winter* emerges as a compelling example of metamodern literary cannon.

## **8. *Spring***

The novel *Spring* primarily focuses on the character of Richard Lease, a successful elderly director, who grieves over the loss of his work companion, a good friend and lover, a scriptwriter Patricia (Paddy). Richard considers working on a film project that portrays a fictional relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Rainer Maria Rilke. From the beginning, a reader will learn that Paddy has passed away and the relationship between Richard and Paddy is revealed gradually, alongside the present story in which Richard throws away his mobile phone, detaches himself from his current life, and decides to take a train somewhere into the unknown. The other storyline concentrates on Brittany, a young lady working for an Immigration Removal Centre, who is accosted by a twelve-year-old girl Florence asking Brittany strange questions. Brittany, thinking the girl might be a strange girl who caused a scandal in her work earlier, accompanies the girl on her journey to Scotland. These two stories meet at the train station where Brittany and Florence save Richard from falling from the platform. Richard, Brittany, and Florence meet a librarian, who gives all of them a lift to the north of the country. Richard starts to work on his documentary project concerning immigrants and interviews some participants in a secret operation regarding assisting detained immigrants. The identity of these interviewees is hidden, nevertheless, one of them is undoubtedly Alda. At the end of the novel, we learn that Brittany feels deceived because according to her, Florence uses hypnosis to manipulate her. Alda and Florence are detained as a result of their public behaviour.

### **8.1 Analysis of *Spring***

#### **8.1.1 Symbolism**

A significant part of the book takes place on the train. A train might symbolize movement and change and it also evokes a journey. Characters (Richard, Brittany, and Florence) are on their journey of personal development, they head toward particular goals, although some of them do not know the purpose of their journey yet.

Another symbol that is mentioned in the book is the character of Orpheus. In Greek mythology, Orpheus was known as a legendary musician who was able to charm all living things with his music. One can liken Orpheus to Florence, as she coaxes Brittany to accompany her on her journey to find the place from the postcard. Orpheus

is also associated with grief and loss, as he lost his loving wife. This might refer to Richard's loss of his beloved friend and lover.

### **8.1.2 Flashback Technique**

A flashback technique is used mainly across the part narrating Richard's point of view. Mostly in the first part of the book, Richard recalls his long-time friend and lover Paddy. His memories take the form of flashbacks, transporting the reader to particular moments in Richard and Paddy's past. Thanks to flashback events, a reader can deepen his understanding of Richard's character and his relationship with Paddy. The flashbacks are inserted into the current narrative, however, it is always clear whether we are in the present or past and it does not cause any difficulty in comprehension.

### **8.1.3 Stream of Consciousness**

Since, stream of consciousness is one of the most prominent characteristics of Smith's writing style, its occurrence in *Spring* is not unexpected. Here I present an example of stream of consciousness taken from the part of the book where the narrator summarizes the things Brittany has learned in her first two months in her job as a Detention Custody Officer in the Immigration Removal Centre. One of the points from the list is written in the stream-of-consciousness form:

How to say without thinking much about it, *they're kicking it off. We're not a hotel. If you don't like it here go home. How dare you ask for a blanket.* The day she heard herself say the last one she knew something terrible was happening, but by now the terrible thing, as terrible as death, felt quite far away as if not really happening to her, as if happening beyond perspex, like the stuff in the windows, though they were designed to look like windows.<sup>55</sup>

I provided the whole point for the sake of not violating the comprehensiveness, nevertheless, the stream of consciousness can be spotted mainly in the second part of the quotation.

### **8.1.4 Intertextuality**

The occurrence of references to other literary works, well-known figures, events, and other notable elements is a crucial part of *Spring*. One of the most significant

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<sup>55</sup> Ali Smith, *Spring* (London: Penguin Books, 2020), 166.

references in the novel is the one of writer Katherine Mansfield. Katherine Mansfield's work is admired by Paddy, who mentions it several times during intellectual conversations with Richard. Moreover, Richard is offered cooperation on the film concerning the fictional relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Rainer Maria Rilke. Some of Mansfield's works are presented in the novel and thanks to their unconventional approach to life, they influence the characters' paths. Mansfield represents the possibility of freedom and helps characters to break free from their conventional style of living and lets them explore the nature of art and creativity.

In *Spring*, we can come across references to the previous novel of the *Seasonal Quartet Winter*. Brittany works as a DCO (Detainee Custody Officer) in an IRC (Immigration Removal Centre), which is a security company dealing with immigrants. She works under the patronage of a company called SA4AF, which is the same company Artur from *Winter* works for. The intertextuality connects the two novels the same as one of the main themes that the novels share – an immigration crisis.

At the beginning of the book, just as in *Autumn* and *Winter*, we have the reference to Charles Dicken's novel. In this particular case, the novel is *Hard Times*. The very first line in *Spring* goes: "Now what we don't want is facts. What we want is bewilderment."<sup>56</sup>, which resembles the first line in Dicken's novel, however, Dicken's meaning is the opposite, he demands facts.

### **8.1.5 Polyphony**

In *Spring*, just like in *Autumn* and *Winter*, we meet an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator who accompanies us through both Richard's and Brittany's points of view of the story. The narrator can see into the characters' minds and also brings past events to complement the narration.

As mentioned above, the reader can encounter different points of view. The first part of the book is dedicated to Richard's point of view, the middle part is narrated from the point of view of Brittany, and in the last part of the book, those two perspectives take turns. Using the polyphonic technique of switching between characters' perspectives, Smith creates a rich and varied portrait of the novel's world. Furthermore, there are some scenes where the exact dialogue is viewed from Richard's perspective, and later on, Brittany's perspective on the same situation is provided.

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, *Spring*, 3.

First, I present Richard's version of the particular situation. Richard and Brittany sit in the front seat of the van together with Florence and Aldo. The two are having a conversation, Brittany talks about a film about Nazis. Richard expresses his opinion on films with Nazis themes and the narrator continues with: "The security woman thanks him. Pleasure, he says."<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, I provide Brittany's point of view on the same situation: "Thanks anyway. For the sheer banality of your observations, Brit says. My pleasure, the man says. Brit gives him a look like he's a constant watch case."<sup>58</sup> It is noteworthy that both characters remember the identical situation in slightly different ways. The multiple points of view allow us to see the story from different angles and understand its complexity.

As with the previous novels of the tetralogy, *Spring* incorporates various forms of media, such as lists, emails, and tweets, which contribute to the reader's engagement with the text in a more dynamic way. For instance, a reader can take a look, at an e-mail correspondence between Richard and Paddy's sons, Paddy's long hand-written note on the ultimate page of the book Richard was given a few years after her death, or a text on the postcard Florence shows to Brittany:

*5.30pm 16 04 86 INVERNESS A 'Hail Caledonia'  
Product Dear Simon we arrived in Kingussie  
Saturday night 5.30 It was a nice journey. The  
weather here is very warm with plenty of sun  
today Monday I am going to Inverness in the  
afternoon to have a look at Loch Ness by coach  
so cheerio now. From Uncle Desmond<sup>59</sup>*

Last but not least, the writing style is to keep the reader's attention. Smith again plays with the narrative techniques she uses. The traditional narrative technique changes into the dramatic form of writing, which has at least two reasons. The first reason is to keep the reader's attention and to keep the reader entertained. The second reason is to narrate the scene differently as the same scene was already depicted from a different perspective. Here is depicted Brit's lack of interest and even boredom, while listening to the conversation between Richard and Aldo:

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<sup>57</sup> Smith, *Spring*, 242.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 296.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 172.

her: *think I know a really good place for you to say goodbye to your friend blah blah a really ancient place standing stones ancient place of burial really beautiful*

him: *sounds like it might be exactly right*

her: *Except it's got a tendency to be busy since they started making Outlander*

him: *what's Outlander*

her: *TV series all about time traveling you don't know Outlander wow everybody knows Outlander where've you been blah inspired by Clava so many cars now it's hard to get home sometimes or get parked outside your own house and now people go there to have seances to try to raise characters that have died in Outlander*

him: *seances to contact dead fictional characters*

her: *aye I know*

*(Laughter)*<sup>60</sup>

It should be mentioned that the discourses from the scene above are not authentic because they are embroidered by the character who is irritated by them.

To complete the whole triangle of main literary genres, besides prose and dramatic form, there is an example of poetry in the novel. It is the last verse of the poem "Cloud" by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

#### **8.1.6 Temporal Disorder**

The novel consists of three parts. The first part tells the story from Richard's point of view. In the second part, we take a view from Brittany's perspective, and in the last part, Richard's and Brittany's points of view take turns. There is a chronological storyline hidden below the layers of other events and actions. Nevertheless, the prevailing non-linear narrative structure, with events occurring out of chronological order, creates a sense of disorientation. The two, at first sight unconnected, storylines meet each other, and from a certain point in time, they share the story for a while, and little after they disconnect.

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<sup>60</sup> Smith, *Spring*, 303.

Smith juxtaposes the present and the past and explores how events from the past might impact and shape the present. While reading it, the novel is unwrapping itself and gradually provides several facts that start to give meaning. Smith feeds readers with missing pieces of a jigsaw and readers collect them and complete the whole story. For instance, Paddy calls Richard *DoubleDick*, and the reason is explained in the second half of the book. Another good example of this is the explanation of the origin of Richard's imaginary daughter. Richard describes this in the email regarding Paddy's funeral. Moreover, nearly at the end of the book, there is a connection revealed with the first book of the *Seasonal Quartet* as a reader finds out that there are family relationships between characters from *Autumn* and *Spring*.

### 8.1.7 Magic Realism

The most prominent element of magic realism in the book is undoubtedly the character of Florence, a girl who definitely carries some secret and with whom Brittany forms a close bond. At first sight, Florence looks like an ordinary girl, nevertheless, from a certain point of time, a reader starts to realize there is something suspicious about the girl. The first impulse of suspiciousness emerges when the train guard comes to check the train tickets and does not seem to notice the presence of Florence: "He doesn't even look at the girl, never mind ask whether she's got a ticket or who's going to pay for it."<sup>61</sup> Even Florence herself admits that sometimes people do not see her and she is invisible: "Sometimes I am invisible, the girl says. In certain shops or restaurants or ticket queues or supermarkets, or even places when I'm actually speaking out loud, like asking for information in a station or something. People can look right through me."<sup>62</sup> This is the first moment a reader starts questioning the credibility of the character and starts to realize that Florence might be a ghost or any other supernatural creature. Brittany has difficulty with blurred boundaries between reality and illusion.

In addition, as a supernatural element can be considered an imaginary girl Richard sees in his mind and pretends to be his missing daughter. Richard treats the girl as a human being and holds conversations with her in his head. The image of his daughter usually talks to Richard and advises him on what to do in situations when Richard needs to be advised: "Don't go, the imaginary daughter says. How can we not? he says. We don't need to, she says. I can't not. I have to honour her, he says. So do

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<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Spring*, 192.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

something that'll really honour her, she says."<sup>63</sup> In this specific passage, the imaginary daughter advises Richard to not go to Paddy's funeral. Richard confesses that the product of his imagination behaves the same way Paddy would behave. At this point, we can speculate about Paddy's reincarnation into the mental image of Richard's daughter. Whether this is true or not, we still cannot deny the fact that this idea brings a supernatural element into the story.

As metamodernism balances two contradictory movements and historical epochs, *Spring* also deals with two characters with opposing interests. What I intend to show is the contradiction in the perception of dealing with incoming immigrants to Britain. On the one hand, there is Alda, who helps detained immigrants under the patronage of a secret operation, and on the other hand, there is Brittany who works as a Detention Custody Officer (DCO) in International Removal Centre (IRC). She is hired by a private security firm called SA4A. Even though Alda refused to give Brittany a lift, she was persuaded by Florence, who claims that she has confidence in Brittany and she is responsible for her. The two opposites, Alda and Brittany, are supposed to spend some time along with Richard and Florence in the van on the journey to the north of the country. In other words, they co-exist in order to be a part of the unit. The resembling co-existence can be observable in terms of metamodernism, where both modernist and postmodernist features contribute to shaping a trend of metamodern sensibility.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 82.



## **9. Summer**

Summer is the final novel of the *Seasonal Quartet* and it brings the final unraveling of the quartet. The first part starts with the divorced Greenlaw family: a teenage girl Sacha, her brother Robert, their divorced parents Jeff and Grace, and Jeff's current girlfriend Ashley who stopped speaking. Because of the sibling accident between Sacha and Robert, two strangers, Charlotte and Arthur, who helped Sacha meet Grace and during the long conversation, Grace with Sacha and Robert are invited to a trip with Charlotte and Arthur. Charlotte and Arthur are undoubtedly characters from *Winter*, and the purpose of their trip north is to visit an old man as it was a wish from Arthur's deceased mother. Arthur tracked at the moment a one-hundred-and-four-year-old Daniel Gluck and together with new travelers is on his way to meet him.

Daniel Gluck resides at the house of his neighbour, where his neighbour's daughter and at the same time a friend Elisabeth takes care of him. A reader might find out, that these two characters are also familiar because they are the main characters from *Autumn*. New characters are introduced, which are Daniel's sister Hannah with her child and Lorenza Mazzetti. The individual storylines get mixed and lead to a surprising discovery regarding relations among characters.

When Charlotte and Arthur occur in the story, the idea of *Autumn* and *Winter* connection appears. That is the first sign when a reader realizes that novels from the *Seasonal Quartet* should not be regarded as separate novels but as one full-length novel.

### **9.1 Analysis of Summer**

#### **9.1.1 Symbolism**

One of the symbols I would like to point out is the green colour. The green colour is mentioned several times in the novel and it symbolizes hope, new beginnings, peace, freshness, and harmony. One example of the green colour representing hope is when Daniel recalls his memories from his youth and describes the cottage at the Isle of Men where he was deported together with all Jews and other people who were considered enemies by the Nazis. Daniel describes that "there's a green grass square in front of the houses and it's got flowers, annuals, in the borders fresh-cut into it, and beyond it through the wire down the hill a view of the sea." The green square of grass

and the view of the sea give prisoners hope of possible release and indicate new beginnings somewhere across the sea.

One can also notice the symbolism of the surname of the family Greenlaw. The problematic relationships among the family concerning (not merely) the difference of opinion, and problematic behaviour of the son Robert, are without a doubt not pleasant, nevertheless, the colour green “hidden” in the family’s surname suggests hope for a better tomorrow and brighter future. Besides these two examples, the green colour is mentioned several times more in the novel.

Another symbol occurring in the novel is the symbol of birds – a symbol of freedom. Sacha writes about birds in her letter to a Vietnamese detainee, whom she calls a Hero and does not know him personally, and mentions the swifts. She compares swifts to “a flying message in the bottle”<sup>64</sup> as she describes that their arrival signifies the beginning of the summer. Since Sacha writes about birds as a symbol of freedom, she also believes in the release of the detainee as she thinks he is imprisoned without justification.

The symbols of birds and green colour are in one passage depicted altogether. Grace recalls her teenage memories, and on her walk, she notices “A tiny bird – a wren? Flies across her path. Hello, bird. Hedgerow. Greenness. Verge and leaf and grass, long seed-headed grasses.”<sup>65</sup> Birds and green hedgerows signify the hope and freedom she misses at the moment.

### **9.1.2 Flashback Technique**

Taking into consideration, the main storyline takes place at the beginning, and during the first coronavirus lockdown, we can find some flashbacks in the story. The character of Daniel Gluck recalls his memories from his youth. The flashbacks take the form of a mixture of dreams and imagination. It is problematic to estimate whether Daniel’s flashbacks are dreams, falls into unconsciousness, or just ordinary recollecting memories in Daniel’s mind. He faces the problem of keeping his attention on the conversations with Elisabeth which are interrupted by these flashbacks. The flashbacks capture fragments from Daniel’s deportation to the Isle of Man, usually stories and people he remembers.

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<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Summer*, 119.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 288.

Thanks to Daniel's flashbacks, the reader can also confirm their feeling about Daniel's sexual orientation as in Daniel's flashback dream, he describes his sexual experience with his male friend during the imprisonment at The Isle of Man. Daniel himself is ashamed of it as he knows that his potential coming out would be at this particular time hazardous.

### 9.1.3 Stream of Consciousness

Daniel and Elisabeth have still the same favourite pastime – describing the pictures. While Elisabeth describes an artwork *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* by *Ambrogio Lorenzetti* she saw on her excursion in Siena, she is asked to describe the artwork not from her phone, but from her memory only. She closes her eyes and tries to recall all the details from the artwork using the stream-of-consciousness method:

Bright architecture under a night sky, she says. Houses, sweet communal living. People selling things, people working, writing, making things. People getting married. People on horseback, people holding each other by the hand. A human train or chain, maybe a dance by the children of Venus, maybe just happy people holding on to each other. A peaceful city. Summer has come. They're sprightly, the figures. A bit of damage, but not much. Well restored. Holding its own, still bright down the centuries.<sup>66</sup>

### 9.1.4 Intertextuality

We witness the intertextuality within the *Seasonal Quartet* itself. From the presence of the characters from previous novels, we can assume or deduce how individual storylines continued and whether anything crucial happened to the main characters. We can see how a hateful breakup between two people may arise in a harmonious friendship, which is the case for Arthur and Charlotte. The characters' storylines mingle and a reader can see how the characters are interconnected. Smith's skill in delivering the art of connection among characters is fascinating and readers will surely appreciate it. After all, all the pieces of the jigsaw find their place and create unity.

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<sup>66</sup> Smith, *Summer*, 160.

Furthermore, we come across a reference to a made-up novel about the fictional relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Rainer Maria Rilke that occurred in *Spring*. In *Summer*, Elisabeth mentions the novel when Daniel asks her what she is reading at the moment.

A well-known historical figure, whose life story is narrated in the novel, is the famous Italian film director Lorenza Mazzetti. Her short biography is covered in one chapter discovering fascinating and at the same time petrifying facts from her life. Another historical figure that is mentioned is a sculptor. One of her sculptures is to be found in Daniel's room.

*Summer* also refers to real historical events, one of which is the Imprisonment of Jewish Refugees and other Enemy Aliens on the Isle of Man. One of the characters experienced imprisonment and the frightening memories of those times are reflected in his daydreams and imagination. In addition, there are references to current political and social events. As an example, I provide one that is worthy of notice. It is the protest for George Floyd which mentions Sacha in her second letter to the imprisoned Hero.

### **9.1.5 Polyphony**

Summer is, just as all novels from the tetralogy, narrated by a heterodiegetic omniscient narrator, which allows the reader to see into the characters' minds. Nevertheless, access into the mind is available only for the character from whose perspective the story is narrated at the moment.

The beginning of the first part of the book is seen from Sacha's perspective and later on, after the "accident" with her brother, the perspective switches to her brother Robert and we can see the story from his angle. The second part is narrated from Daniel Gluck's point of view. Therefore, we can draw a comparison between Elisabeth's perspective from *Autumn*, and Daniel's current perspective. One intriguing thing is the addressing of the characters. Whereas Elisabeth called Daniel by his name in *Autumn*, in *Summer*, Daniel does not call Elisabeth by her name but rather names her *the neighbour's daughter*, which is fairly impersonal if we take into consideration that Elisabeth takes Daniel as a life-long friend, even her platonic lover. It could signify that Daniel does not see their friendship as strong as Elisabeth does and he does not want to build a close bond with someone as he knows nothing lasts forever and many of his

friends and relatives passed away even at a young age, so he does not want to feel emotionally attached to someone.

Later on, when we are introduced new characters, we are presented with new perspectives. There is a flashback perspective of Daniel's sister Hannah and the perspective of Grace Greenlaw too. Moreover, there is one chapter dedicated to Lorenza Mazzetti and her biography from her point of view.

When the story is presented from Grace's point of view, the reader can notice again the difference of the characters' perceptions. When Grace, her children, and Arthur with Charlotte, are having dinner together, they discuss their meeting with Daniel. Grace mentions, that when Arthur gave the small piece of stone, which his mother wanted him to hand to Daniel, Daniel "said the weird thing, *the stone is a child* –,"<sup>67</sup> Immediately, her daughter responds: "That's not what he said. He said *you've brought back the child.*"<sup>68</sup> Here we can see that the perception is subjective and characters may interpret or understand things in different ways based on their viewpoints.

#### **9.1.6 Temporal Disorder**

Like in her previous novels, Ali Smith's plays with the temporal order in *Summer*, presenting events out of order to create a non-linear narrative.

The first part of the book is narrated chronologically. If any additional information is needed, it is communicated through dialogues among characters. The second part is also narrated chronologically but with several flashbacks into Daniel's past. The first and the second part of the book take place simultaneously as both of them head towards the common outcome that happens in the third part of the book.

The temporal disorder adds to the richness and complexity of the novel, allowing the reader to piece together the characters' histories and see how their past experiences have shaped who they are in the present.

#### **9.1.7 Magic Realism**

The only element of magic realism that occurs in the novel is the bleeding ghosts that hunt Lorenza Mazzetti. Its origin is undoubtedly memories from her childhood

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<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Summer*, 274.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

when she witnessed the murder of her dearest ones. The image of the bleeding ghosts inspired her to write famous novels: “The bleeding ghosts still accompany her, wherever she is, whatever she’s doing. They’d been in my unconscious for too long. So she writes a novel called *Il Cielo Cade*.”<sup>69</sup>

## 9.2. Metamodernism in *Summer*

Similarly to the previous novels, I analyzed *Summer* and searched for specific modern and postmodern features that can be found in previous chapter.

Just as in previous novels by Smith, *Summer* deals with current social, environmental and political issues such as Brexit, climate crisis, Australian wildfires, pandemic of Covid-19 and the societal impacts of events like the murder of George Floyd. Particularly the theme of the Covid-19 pandemic serves as a central and pervasive element throughout the novel. The author weaves the pandemic into the story, capturing its impact on individuals and society at large.

Another metamodern and contemporary social trend is the atypical family living. Sasha’s divorced parents live next door, and furthermore, her father shares the flat with his girlfriend. At first sight, this situation seems strange, nevertheless, we need to take into consideration other modern social trends, such as living in a throuple, polyamorous relationships or separate living, that are becoming more usual each day.

Like other works from Smith’s *Seasonal Quartet*, *Summer* features a fragmented narrative structure that oscillates between past and present and therefore, it is difficult for a reader to recognize boundaries between past and present.

*Summer* exemplifies many of the characteristic features of metamodernism, from its fragmented narrative structure to its engagement with contemporary issues. Thus, *Summer* emerges as a compelling example of metamodern literature, offering readers a thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of the modern world.

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<sup>69</sup> Smith, *Summer*, 261.

## 10. Metamodernism and its further development

As I mentioned in the previous chapters, metamodernism seems to me as a small baby of postmodernism, inheriting most of postmodern features, structures and characteristics. It is significant to point out that there is a crucial obstacle with metamodernism. I am afraid that defining it as “a relatively new philosophical and cultural movement as a response or continuation of postmodernism” is not enough for a clear conception. In a first place, is it a continuation or rather a response to postmodernism? Those are two relatively dissimilar opinions. This lack of clear definition can make it difficult to understand and apply in practice. In other words, its broad scope and diverse interpretations may lead to confusion and inconsistency in its application. In my personal view, there might be an urge among theorists to come up with a new movement as a reaction to today’s rapidly changing world.

Despite the problem of definition and its conception in general, one thing is certain. Metamodernism is as uncertain and unexplored as the contemporary world. We are always on the edge, not knowing if a war might break out in some corner of the globe or if a natural disaster might strike unexpectedly. Moreover, there is a justified fear of a new pandemic, like the one we have recently experienced, which can turn our lives upside down in the wink of an eye. On top of all that, we are constantly amazed (as well as a little worried) by how far digital technology and AI might progress. People all around the globe are unsure of what is coming next in these fraught times, and that feeling of uncertainty might be unsettling. We live in a metamodern era full of uncertainty and unpredictability, where the unthinkable becomes reality. This might sound insane and far-fetched, but recall the events and changes that have happened during last decades (or even years) and perhaps you might agree with this claim.

Will metamodernism eventually extend beyond the realms of art, philosophy and literature to influence politics, economics and social systems? Will metamodernism be replaced by some other movement as a reaction to the constantly shaping world around us? I hesitate to say. Nevertheless, I am afraid, my generation will not live to see it, although what else unexpected might happen in this world?

## 11. Conclusion

In my diploma thesis, I concentrated on four contemporary novels (*Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*, which are altogether called *Seasonal Quartet*) by a Scottish writer Ali Smith in terms of showing characteristic features typical for metamodern movement to classify the novels as metamodern.

In the theoretical part of my thesis, I outlined a brief history of Scottish literature with an emphasis on Scottish women writers. I explained the term metamodernism out of consideration for the previous movements from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modernism and postmodernism, which work as cornerstones for the definition and comprehension of the fundamental principles of metamodernism. Moreover, I provided and explained some of the characteristic features of both modernism and postmodernism, such as the usage of flashback technique, stream of consciousness, symbolism, and postmodernist features, such as intertextuality, temporal disorder, and magic realism.

Then, I concentrated on the author of the *Seasonal Quartet*, Ali Smith. I briefly described Smith's biography and her unique writing style including the features that are specific to her literary works, such as the usage of figurative language, the themes she chooses, and references across her work. Regarding those features, I also provided some examples from Smith's previous literary works to show the feature's authentic occurrence.

I analyzed each novel separately (in the order of the publication) and my target was to search for the characteristic modernist and postmodernist features mentioned above. I briefly summarized the content and main characters of each novel, and then I demonstrated the occurrence of modern and postmodern features in each novel. Furthermore, I provided several examples to prove my claim.

To sum up, despite the lack of clear definition and theoretical background of metamodernism, all four novels (*Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*) from Ali Smith's *Seasonal Quartet* discussed in this diploma thesis reflect plenty of both modernist and postmodernist features, and therefore can be classified as metamodern.



## Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se soustředí na čtyři současné romány (*Podzim, Zima, Jaro, a Léto*), jimž se dohromady říká *Seasonal Quartet*, od skotské autorky Ali Smith z hlediska poukázání na existenci prvků typických pro metamodernistické hnutí a následné zařazení těchto románů do metamodernistického literárního kánonu.

V teoretické části této diplomové práce je vysvětlen termín metamodernismus v souvislosti k předešlým hnutím 20. století, modernismu a postmodernismu, jež jsou považovány za výchozí body při definování a porozumění základních principů metamodernismu. Kromě toho, jsem dodala a vysvětlila některé z typických prvků modernismu i postmodernismu, jako například použití retrospektivní techniky, proudu vědomí, symbolismu, a také postmoderní charakteristiky, jako jsou intertextualita, porušení časové souvislosti, a magický realismus.

Poté jsem se zaměřila na samotnou autorku *Seasonal Quartet*, Ali Smith. Popsala jsem její životopis a její unikátní styl psaní zahrnující prvky a techniky, které jsou specifické pro její literární díla. Například použití přenesené mluvy, charakteristická témata, které si Smith vybírá, odkazy na jiná díla. V rámci této sekce jsem také uvedla příklady těchto literárních prvků z předešlých autorčiných děl, a to proto, abych poukázala na autentičnost výskytu těchto literárních prvků a charakteristik.

Každý z románů jsem podrobila analýze zvlášť, a to v pořadí jejich vydání. Můj cíl bylo vyhledat v románech typické prvky a literární techniky pro modernismus a postmodernismus, které jsem již zmiňovala. U každého románu jsem stručně popsala obsah a hlavní postavy, a poté jsem demonstrovala výskyt metamoderních a postmoderních charakteristik. Také jsem uvedla příklady těchto charakteristik přímo z textu, abych potvrdila svou tezi.

Na závěr bych ráda dodala, že i navzdory chybějící jasné definici metamodernismu, všechny čtyři romány ze *Seasonal Quartet* (*Podzim, Zima, Jaro, Léto*) od Ali Smith analyzované v této práci vykazují obrovské množství jak moderních, tak postmoderních charakteristik, a proto mohou být označena jako metamoderní.

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## Annotation

Author: Bc. Anna Řeháčková

Department: Department of English and American Studies

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Annotation: This thesis concentrates on four contemporary novels by Ali Smith, namely *Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*. The aim of this thesis is to set a theoretical background of recent artistic movement called metamodernism and analyze these novels by finding features that correlate with the metamodern movement. The thesis also provides specific examples from the novels of the metamodern features.

## Anotace

Autor:	Bc. Anna Řeháčková
Katedra:	Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
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Anotace: Tato diplomová práce se soustřeďuje na čtyři současné romány autorky Ali Smith, a to konkrétně *Podzim*, *Zima*, *Jaro*, a *Léto*. Cílem této práce je nastínit teoretický rámec tohoto relativně nového uměleckého hnutí a podrobit analýze tyto romány. Nalezením prvků, které souvisí s metamoderním hnutím poté umožní tento *Seasonal Quartet* klasifikovat jako metamoderní. Tato práce rovněž poskytuje konkrétní příklady metamoderních prvků z těchto čtyř románů.