



Research article

A Saga of Cosmopolitan Friendship in Time of the Breaking of Nations: A Study of Ali Smith's *Autumn*

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Abstract

Brexit, Britain's exit from the supranational polity of the European Union has unsettled the vision of European unity. Rather than nourishing an "and/ both" cosmopolitan view even in the limited context of continental relationship, Britain inculcates an "either/ or" jingoistic nationalism fed on Euroscepticism. English literature has a long tradition of invoking political issues and Brexit has inaugurated a new sub-genre, 'BrexLit'. The paper seeks to attempt a detailed study of Scottish writer Ali Smith's novel *Autumn* (2016), designated by *The New York Times* as "the first great Brexit novel". The first of the seasonal quartet, this novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2017 and bagged the 2016 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction. Embedded in the Brexit Britain, the novel raises questions of citizenship, particularly in relation to immigration, and mirrors the loss of cultural conviviality. The paper discusses anti-immigrant toxicity, the upsurge of nostalgic appetite for national heritage, and the territorial social ontology of the contemporary English national outlook. The paper studies, in the context of the narrative, how the media resorts to post-truth politics and right-wing nationalistic propaganda in media resulting in the death of democracy and the end of dialogue. The paper explores how the novel advocates an inclusive, realistic cosmopolitanism through Elisabeth-Daniel friendship.

Keywords: BrexLit, nationalism, Anti-immigrant toxicity, post-truth politics, Euroscepticism



[Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions](#)

1. Introduction

Brexit and EU

Brexit, the recent watershed resulting in the break-up of Britain from the European Union (EU) has given a jolt to the dream of European unity. Cosmopolitan critic Ulrich Beck has stated that the "egoism of the member states, economic self-interest and the asymmetries in influence on political decision has given birth to a deformed cosmopolitanism" (2006, p. 20). Whereas Daniele Archibugi hails the EU as "the first international model which begins to resemble the cosmopolitan

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model" (1998, p. 219), Chris Rumford opines that the EU reports in general "eschew[s] the language of cosmopolitanism" (2006, p. 04). As claimed by various critics like, Daniele Archibugi, this supranational polity has tried to give cosmopolitanism's universal abstractions a concrete shape through various transnational projects. In the strictest term, the EU is no forum endorsing the cosmopolitan view, rather a capitalist hub. Nevertheless, in the graveyard of post-World War II European space, it tried, in its limited capacity, to bridge up the national and cosmopolitical tensions. However, to seek the reasons of this epoch-making event, the paper engages with a diachronic study of English nationalism which reveals that the discourse of Englishness is characterized by a periodic inclusion and exclusion of the beyond. Homi k. Bhabha argues that every nation defines itself by simultaneously gazing inward to regard the "heimlich pleasures of the hearth" and repudiating the "unheimlich terror of the space or race of the other" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 02). England, first of all, defined itself against France and then against the Empire. But in the absence of the imperial other who is the new other to define against? And the answer is the European Union (EU).

The EU was never perceived as an integral part of Britain in the public imaginary. Even politically, it was constructed as a "choice" for British people who can opt for an in/ out for it. The Labour Manifesto of the October 1974 UK general election promised that the people would decide through the ballot box whether to remain in the EEC. The 1975 Referendum, the first national referendum ever to be held throughout the entire UK to consider the UK's relationship with the EU, gauged the support for the country's continued membership of the EEC. Even if the Referendum result (67.23% Yes and 32.77% No) apparently ended the debate with the two-to-one majority, the undercurrent of Euroscepticism betrayed itself time and again in the social parlance as well as in the foreign policies of both Labour and Conservative leaders. However, the (dis)credit of bringing it to the center stage of British politics goes to Thatcher. A discourse analysis of her "The Bruges Speech" (1988) is a marker of this truth. The ambivalent attitude displayed in the speech is not difficult to read. Through the EU, she wanted to make the most in trade and commerce, but aimed at maintaining British exceptionalism. Both Labour and Conservative leaders including Churchill and Brown constructed the EU as "the Other". In Churchillian foreign policy, "the Europe Circle" was ranked as the least important among the three circles (the other two being "the English-speaking Circle" and "the Empire Commonwealth Circle"). This condescension is emblematic of Euroscepticism.

Euroscepticism is traceable in the foreign policy of a declared pro-European Prime Minister Tony Blair also. Blair aimed at situating an internationalist approach of interdependence at the epicenter of British Foreign policy in the initial phase of his prime ministership but failed because of the entrenched Eurosceptic tradition and the presence of Murdoch. Lance Price opined how Murdoch's presence was "always felt, especially on the Europe question" (Price, 2006). Holden stated how Blair was destined "to stay in with the Eurosceptic Murdoch-dominated press" (2011, p. 159). Jonathan Powell, Blair's Chief of Staff asserted that they ought to have been "braver in confronting Murdoch and other newspaper owners on the subject of Europe" (Powel, 2010, p. 206). Though Thatcher and Blair have been traditionally assigned different statuses in matters of European question, Oliver Daddow in his article, "Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and the Eurosceptic Tradition in Britain" aligns them: "their foreign policy thinking worked the key themes

in the Eurosceptic tradition" (2012, p. 07). Both wanted to bag economic advantage from the EU. Blair admitted:

We should deal with the world as it is, not how we want it to be. We should have confidence, both in our vision and pragmatism. (Blair, 1999)

In 2013, the Conservative Party leader David Cameron promised to re-consider the EU membership if the Conservatives are re-elected, and hence, emerged the question of the 2016 Referendum to decide on the continued EU affiliation. Rather than nourishing an "and/ both" cosmopolitan view even in the limited context of continental relationship, Britain inculcates an either/ or jingoistic nationalism fed on Euroscepticism. Again, Britain's emerging relationship with the US also plays a great role in nurturing this sentiment. An analysis of UKIP's campaign video "We're Better Off Out" shows how the EU is posed as a restrictive body encroaching upon the freedom of British people. The roles of the Newspapers and Broadsheets like *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *The Daily Telegraph* are not to be ignored. Similarly, the Remain group's failure to develop a clear rational narrative on the benefits of EU membership and the Leave group's success to appeal to emotion rather than reason through the employment of post-truth politics, influenced heavily the Referendum result. The threat of the influx of Middle-East and North African refugees, as well as economic migrants from Eastern Europe, and the fear of the loss of political and legal sovereignty, projected the EU as the potential Other. Euroscepticism has strengthened its roots in post-2008 Eurozone crisis period and the EU Referendum has further galvanised it. Narratives of strictly exclusive nationalism have been gaining a central position in political debates. Rejecting a shared European identity, pro-Leave nationalists aim to instill strong Euroscepticism within the English mindscape.

Brexit and Novel

The question remains whether Brexit, which results in a shift in global geopolitics, has any relevance for a student of literature. Literature, as an aspect of culture, is closely related to national identity and English literature has a long tradition of invoking political issues. Robert Eaglestone, Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought at the University of London, states:

Brexit is not only political, economic and administrative: perhaps most significantly it is an event in culture, too. Brexit grew from cultural beliefs, real or imaginary, about Europe and the UK; the arguments before, during and after the Referendum were—and are—arguments about culture. (Eaglestone, 2018, p. 01)

Brexit, Britain's withdrawal from the EU has inaugurated a new sub-genre, 'BrexLit'. Kristian Shaw, Senior Lecturer in Contemporary and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Lincoln, says:

BrexLit concerns fiction that either directly respond or imaginatively allude to Britain's exit from the EU or engage with the subsequent socio-cultural, economic, racial or cosmopolitical consequences of Britain's withdrawal. (qtd. in Eaglestone, 2018, p. 18)

This genre, a version of the twentieth-century dystopian fiction and a variation of Condition-of-England novels, enhances British novels' engagements with political culture. Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016) Anthony Cartwright's *The Cut* (2017), Sam Byer's *Perfidious Albion* (2018), Jonathan Coe's *Middle England* (2018), Michael Paraskos's *Rabbitman* (2017), Amanda Craig's *The Lie of the Land* (2017), Douglas Board's *Time of Lies* (2017), Stanley Johnson's *Kompromat* (2017) are to name a

few. Baroness Young of Hornsey, the Chair of the 2017 Man Booker Prize judging panel, expressed her surprise over the prompt and ample response of the writers to Brexit. This paper attempts a close reading of Scottish writer Ali Smith's novel *Autumn* (2016), designated by *The New York Times* as "the first great Brexit novel". The first of the seasonal quartet, this novel was shortlisted for Man Booker Prize 2017 and bagged the 2016 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction.

Brexit novels are popularly designated as reified narratives of national division. Popular discourse is that the post-industrial, left-behind, provincial, working class used the June 2016 Referendum to express their discontent towards liberal, metropolitan elites who have forsaken their national identity in favour of a preferred cosmopolitan outlook. The working class alleges that progressive individuals, deracinated by their university education, are indifferent to national identity. These 'anywheres' (borrowing the term from David Goodhart) and their 'achieved' identity contrast the 'ascribed' identity of the 'somewheres'. The paper studies how the novel invokes this putative national divide and addresses the question of citizenship. The study examines how the novel raises questions regarding the reliability of dominant narratives and how the popular, 'constructed' truths of powerful men are highlighted at the expense of ignored minorities. The treatise seeks to investigate how the location of the writer shapes the text and how the personal and the political are intertwined. An attempt has also been made to address how the narratives of "fencing itself off" dominate the corpus of the narrative.

2. Discussion

Autumn

Embedded in the Brexit Britain, Ali Smith's *Autumn* is a collage of multifarious themes like cosmopolitanism/ nationalism, race relations, post-truth politics, the revival of lost female British Pop artist tradition, and lesbianism etc. But the prominent pattern, illuminating the texture of the novel as well as the post-Referendum British world, is the unconditional friendship between Elisabeth and Daniel, who hail from two different nations but their national identities, in the words of Martha Nussbaum, "morally irrelevant" details are mentioned nowhere (Nussbaum, 1994, p. 05). While discussing Tagore's novel, *The Home and the World* which showcases "the defeat of a reasonable and principled cosmopolitanism by the forces of nationalism and ethnocentrism" (1994, p. 05) in the article "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism", Nussbaum champions cosmopolitanism over narrow nationalism and urges to give one's first allegiance to cosmopolitanism for a better world. From their surnames, it could be inferred that Daniel Gluck is a German and Elisabeth de monde is of French origin. But the different national origins of the two immigrants do not stand in the development of a life-long amity. Though they are unequal in age, their friendship is anchored on the solid ground of intellectual, artistic companionship, and cosmopolitan outlook. Elisabeth's surname "de monde" directly alludes to the cosmopolitan outlook of "[the citizen] of the world" and 'Gluck' in German means 'happiness' which stands in contradistinction to post-imperial, inward-looking melancholia.

The novel begins with an allusion to Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), set in the turbulent period of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. History repeats itself and gives the suggestion that civilization is going through another crisis:

It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times. Again. That's the thing about things. They fall apart, always have, always will, it's in their nature. (Smith, 2016, p. 03)

The EU Referendum of 2016 was one of the most divisive moments in British political history, triggering despair and elation in equal measure. It exercises both a utopian and a dystopian space in the collective unconscious and Smith captures this divisiveness brilliantly. An excerpt will validate the observation:

All across the country, there was misery and rejoicing . . . All across the country people felt it was the wrong thing. All across the country, people felt it was the right thing. All across the country, people felt they'd really lost. All across the country, people felt they'd really won. All across the country people felt they'd done the right thing and other people had done the wrong thing . . . All across the country, people felt unsafe. All across the country, people were laughing their heads off. All across the country, people felt bereaved and shocked. All across the country people felt righteous. All across the country, people felt sick. (Smith, 2016, p. 59-60)

The first chapter mingles fact with fiction, dream with reality. In the Maltings Care Providers Plc, Daniel Gluck is in a limbo. Daniel feels like "a punctured football with its stitching split, the leather kind that people kicked a hundred years ago" (Smith, 2016, p. 03). It is an obvious allusion to the 1905 Aliens Act to control Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe, the 1914 Aliens Restriction Act introducing far more restrictive provisions, and the 1919 Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, the legislations which literally started to ping-pong with the immigrants. In his semi-conscious state, Daniel goes through a myriad of experiences, scenes of his youthful tryst mingle with scenes of a tourist beach strewn with dead bodies. His attempt to shield his face so that none gets offended and his thought "if I'd known... I'd have sure to go at twenty, twenty-five" (Smith, 2016, p. 04) or "is there still murder after death?" (Smith, 2016, p. 11) give us a hint at the nationalistic fervour of contemporary Britain. The last scene brings us back to the present day Europe, a world of sadness, a world where people are seen to be holidaying on the beach, below which the shore is full of dead bodies of immigrants. In his semi-conscious state, Daniel sees:

. . . the dark line of the tide-dumped dead.

Some of the bodies of very small children. He crouches down near a swollen man who has a child, just a baby really, still zipped inside his jacket, its mouth open, dripping sea, its head resting dead on the bloated man's chest.

Further up the beach there are more people.

These people are human, like the ones on the shore, but these are alive. They're under parasols. They are holidaying up the shore from the dead. (Smith, 2016, p. 12)

This concluding image of the first section invokes the dialectic of hospitality/ hostility. The reference to the "dark line of the tide dumped dead" (Smith 12) introduces the debate between the ethics and politics of hospitality. Following Derrida and Levinus, for whom hospitality is ethicity, Smith too disregards the politics of hospitality and considers the inability to provide it as an ethical failure. Smith interprets it, in Kantian fashion, as a 'right', and avers that the violation of it tantamounts to crime against humanity as it causes death. Time is out of joint. The sand under

Daniel's tongue gives rise to a cacophonous, grating, grinding sound, which induces an Arnoldean melancholia, an offshoot of attending only the narrow national interest.

Keeping Brexit at the heart of the narrative, the novelist addresses the various issues of contemporary British and European politics. It perfectly mirrors the post-Referendum British society smarting in the grasp of methodological nationalism and anti-immigrant toxicity. Anti-immigrant toxicity is to be located in the hate crimes. The escalation in hate crimes following the 2016 Referendum is communicated in the novel through the reference to the murder of Jo Cox, a pro-immigration Labour MP. The incorporation of this reference in a dream sequence, a walk through "the white Deserts" (p. 38) is strategic:

Someone killed an MP. . . A man shot her dead and came at her with a knife. Like shooting her wouldn't be enough. But it's old news now. Once it would have been a year's worth of news. But news right now is like a flock of speeded-up sheep running off the side of a cliff. (Smith, 2016, p. 38)

The image of a flock of speeded-up sheep running off the side of a cliff, a cinematic shot though, is used to communicate the transitoriness of even such a grievous news. Smith implies that the nationalists' move is suicidal. Pro-immigration Labour MP, Jo Cox was brutally murdered by a man who shouted "Britain first" as he killed her and named himself in the court as "death to traitor, freedom for Britain" (qtd. in *Rule Britannia*, p. 11). The reference to this real-life murder betrays how England is writhing in the grip of narrow nationalism.

As Elisabeth de monde, a thirty years old casual contract junior lecturer at a university in London comes to the post office in the town nearest the village her mother lives to "do check & send with her passport form" (Smith, 2016, p. 15), she confronts the pressure of methodological nationalism. As the spelling of her name differs from the Standard English format, she is cross-examined with a series of questions:

Is your surname really Demand?

...

And you're sure you've spelt your Christian name correctly?

...

It's people from other countries that spell it like that, generally, isn't it?

...

But this does say you're UK . . . (S Smith, 2016, p. 21-22)

Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim points out how people with strange-sounding names regularly face this so-called "where-are-you-from-originally dialogue" (Santana Battaglia). This is also a marker of "prison error of identity" highlighted by Ulrich Beck (2006, p. 25). In Beck's opinion, it reflects the "territorial social ontology of the national outlook" which believes that a person has one native place into which s/he has taken birth (Beck, 2006, p. 26). *Autumn* shows how the failure to meet up with "Standard English" formatting leads to the vilification of Elisabeth. The dealing man gives the verdict: "your face is a wrong size" and writes down on the form "head incorrect size" (Smith, 2016, p. 24-25). Elisabeth retorts:

... this notion that my head is the wrong size in a photograph would mean I have probably done or am going to do something really wrong and illegal ... because I asked you about facial recognition technology ... that makes me a suspect as well ... that I might be some kind of weirdo because there is an s in my name instead of a z. (Smith, 2016, p. 26)

This is a proof of the usual practice of demonization of an immigrant. Sitting in the Post Office, Elisabeth experiences an "uncommunal communal" ambience, for, nobody talks with her (Smith, 2016, p. 18). Just a week after the Referendum, Elisabeth's mother's village prepares for some summer festival, but the attending bonhomie is lost, for, the festoons matching the colours of the national flag float against the sky and this thumping of nationalism creates a nightmarish, threatening ambience. The novel certifies to the fact that communal camaraderie is lost in the Brexit Britain. Daniel Gluck, who has almost forgotten his German origin and assimilated into English culture and is an upholder of "the salad bowl theory" gets more and more unpleasant tweets. Even if Daniel reiteratively emphasizes that their relationship is "about history and being neighbours" (Smith, 2016, p. 45), the community has become totally hostile to the immigrants. Elisabeth suffers the gaze of the village community as she walks through the village. Her mother informs her that "half the village isn't speaking to the other half of the village" (Smith, 2016, p. 54). Her mother's confession, "no one in the village speaks to her anyway or ever has though she's lived here nearly a decade now", is a marker of loss of cultural conviviality (Smith, 2016, p. 54). As Elisabeth passes the houses in the village, in which her mother lives, she sees that someone has written "GO and HOME" (Smith, 2016, p. 138) on the wall of a house. This is an evidence of toxic anti-immigrant rhetoric. The whole atmosphere is punctuated with frenzied, nativist diatribes. A bunch of thugs fill the street past Elisabeth's flat with the following invectives: "Britannia rules the waves. First we'll get the Poles. And then we'll get the Muslims. Then we'll get the gyppos, then the gays" (Smith, 2016, p. 197). The air reverberates with the slogan "go back to Europe" and to her chagrin, Elisabeth senses, what is happening is "a fraction of something volcanic" (Smith, 2016, p. 130). Smith addresses the paranoia behind the immigrant toxicity through Elisabeth's recollection of the humiliation of the Spanish couple in the taxi queue. As the TV program Golden Gavel is broadcasted, Elizabeth ruminates over her experience of the Spanish couple enroute her mother's place:

They'd clearly just arrived here on holiday, their luggage down their feet. The people behind them in the queue shouted at them. What they shouted at them was to go home. This isn't Europe, they shouted. Go back to Europe. (Smith, 2016, p. 130)

Though the Spanish couple is just tourists and no immigrants/ asylum seekers/ refugees, still they are being harassed. Elisabeth's immediate response to it is that of shame: "This is what shame feels like" (Smith, 2016, p. 130). The same sentiment is echoed in the dealing officer's caution, sandwiched between verbal fencing, "permitted to go anywhere not in this island realm" (Smith, 2016, p. 23).

A nostalgic appetite for national heritage is exhibited in the novel in people's attempt to look at the commemorative coins in the plastic display unit celebrating Shakespeare's birth/ death anniversary. Mourning for the imperial past and nostalgia for national heritage, commonly known as heritage boom, are to be observed in real-life Britain. An example may be the revival of the goddess Britannia. Goddess Britannia, who appeared on Roman coins around 119 AD and

disappeared as a symbol on coins in Britain for almost fifteen hundred years, resurfaced shortly before the Act(s) of Union. She was revived again in 2017 to benefit the nationalists. The Britannia 2017 UK 5 ounce gold coin, with the representation of a martial Britannia, may be cited as a glaring example of a nostalgic appetite for national heritage. In the novel, Elisabeth's mother informs her how the former local electrical appliances store has started "selling plastic starfish, pottery looking things, artisan gardening tools, and canvas gardening gloves that look like they've been modelled on a 1950s utilitarian utopia" (Smith, 2016, p. 54). She says that these things cost more than they should and the shopkeeper persuades people that if they buy them, then only they are "living the right kind of life" (Smith, 2016, p. 54). Across the country, the antique things are displayed in such a fashion "on the shelves in the shop and the barns and the warehouses..." that it looks like "a huge national orchestra biding its time" (Smith, 2016, p. 219). The TV show called, *The Golden Gavel*, in which Elisabeth's mother participates, is an antique road show in search of valuable antiques in the junk shop. Erasing the multi-cultural history of Britain, the post-Referendum Britain is in the quest of 'national' antiques and its celebration.

The rhetoric of fencing itself off, the manifestation of "Little Englander syndrome", takes a strong hold in contemporary Britain. Zadie Smith in her essay, "Fences: A Brexit Diary" included in her *Feel Free* essays shows how this isolationist sentiment grips Britain. In *Autumn*, Elisabeth's mother draws the former's attention to "a fence three meters high with a roll of razor wire along the top of it" erected across a common land (Smith, 2016, p. 55). The security cameras on the posts are, in Foucauldian terms, tools of surveillance. Within a short while the fence gets doubled. As Elisabeth steps into the fence, she is threatened and accused of "unlawfully trespassing" (Smith, 2016, p. 142). Sam Byers's *Perfidious Albion* too exhibits how Edmundsbury, the fictional equivalent of the Brexit Britain subscribes to the culture of fencing off. Regular boundaries could be seen and "uses of public space were temporarily suspended" (Byers, p. 67). These fences, emblematic of the prison error of identity of nation, reflect the territorial social ontology of the national outlook mentioned by Ulrich Beck (2006, p. 26). However, later on, Wendy, Elisabeth's mother herself succeeds to bombard that fence "with people's histories and with the artifacts of less cruel and more philanthropic times" (Smith, 2016, p. 255).

The novel *Autumn* has been variously interpreted as a post-truth novel (Shaw 21). Even if the critics claim that the term "post-truth" has entered the political lexicon very recently, the practice is age-old. The pamphlet war initiated by the burgeoning print media in the early 17th century is accepted as the beginning of post-truth politics. Harold Pinter in his Nobel Acceptance speech, "Art, Truth and Politics" (2005) drew our attention to the contemporary politicians' deliberate invocation of the tapestry of lies. The 2016 US Presidential election and Brexit Referendum gave currency to the term. To fire up the voters, the politicians take recourse to this politics. Ali Smith herself admitted to Olivia Laing, the writer who interviewed Smith for *The Observer*:

There has been a massive lie and the lie has come from parliament and dissolved itself right the way through the country and things change. It's a pivotal moment. We were dealing with a kind of mass culture of lies. And it's a question of what happens culturally when something is built on a lie. (qtd. in Eaglestone, 2018, p. 41)

The novel addresses this issue through its reference to Profumo Affair/ Scandal '63 and especially through the Leave side's coercive practices. The Leavers resorted to various tools like repetitiveness, narrowing of sources of information, and stating of quite banal opinions on issues like immigration and international aid. Fake news cheated the uncritical public. One of the two central characters, Daniel admits "the power of the lie . . . always seductive to the powerless" (Smith, 2016, p. 114). As Elisabeth scrolls through the e-version of the newspaper, her eyes meet the open invocation of this falsehood, wooliness, and propaganda—"facts don't work, connect with people emotionally . . ." (Smith, 2016, p. 137). Elisabeth's mother Wendy communicates her anguished helplessness before this reigning post-truth politics:

I'm tired of the news. I'm tired of the way it makes things spectacular that aren't, and deals so simplistically with what's truly appalling . . . I'm tired of liars, I'm tired of sanctified liars. I'm tired of how those liars have let this happen. I'm tired of having to wonder whether they did it out of stupidity or did it on purpose. I'm tired of lying governments. I'm tired of people not caring whether they are being lied to anymore. I'm tired of being made to feel this fearful. I'm tired of pusillanimosity. (Smith, 2016, p. 56-57)

Right-wing nationalistic propaganda results in the death of democracy and the end of dialogue. Sam Byers's *Perfidious Albion* exhibits how old and new media resort to post-truth politics and give air to xenophobic anti-immigrant toxicity. *The Record*, the fictive version of newspapers like *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, portrays a near-apocalyptic world caused by immigration:

The country was overrun, under threat, increasingly incapable. Hordes of immigrants massed at its borders. Its infrastructure frayed at the seams. Basic morality was eroding at an alarming rate, worn down by tolerance, permissiveness, turpitude. (Byers, p. 24)

The excerpt is nothing but an echo of 'swamping' discourse in the immigrant historiography. The narrative bears close resemblance with Nigel Farage's outrageous poster, "Breaking Point" with the caption, "we must break free of EU and take control of our borders" depicting hordes of Middle Eastern immigrants queuing to enter the UK. This poster itself was an example of post-truth politics. The image was that of Syrian refugees crossing into Slovenia. However, the purpose to incite fear in relation to immigration invasion is fully achieved. Byers addresses the role of media in spreading anti-immigrant toxicity. Media warnings about immigration have produced a rally around the flag effect and collective fear is strategically used as a weapon to instigate xenophobia. Another Brexit novel, *The Cut* also addresses the issue of immigration so central to the Brexit debate. But when Grace, the representative of urban elites refers to the immigrants posing threat to remunerative work, housing, underfunded public services, Cairo, the protagonist summarily rejects the concern with immigration with the following observation:

All you people want to say is that it's about immigration. That we'm all racist . . . That we'm all stupid. You doh wanna hear that it's more complicated than that. It lets all of you lot off the hook. Never considered the problem might be you. (Cartwright, p. 24)

Cairo is intelligent enough to read the ploy of media industrialists and the Rich. He considers the issue of immigration as an alibi to draw attention from a grievous concern.

Autumn mourns the all-pervasive masculinist ambience also through its reference to "Scandal 63" and Elisabeth's tutor's denial of the existence of a female British pop tradition. Similarly, as a state-

of-the-nation Brexit novel, *Perfidious Albion* too draws our attention to the cyber sexism rampant in British online spaces. Byer's Brexit dystopia reflects how the whole academic and intellectual world is gendered and how sexism joins hands with racism to showcase white male plight.

Among other immediate and direct inconveniences caused by Brexit, the novel particularly addresses the issue of NHS. Apart from the economy, British National Health System is worst affected by Brexit. British NHS is heavily dependent upon the EU doctors, especially nurses and care assistants. But Brexit has caused a mass exodus of the EU nurses, thereby causing the collapse of the British NHS. New Historicist studies of contemporary data show that compared to the previous years, there have been an 89% drop in number of nurses signing up for work in Britain and a 67% rise in the number of nurses and midwives leaving the register (*Rule Britannia*, p. 180). The novel engages with this real-life problem induced by Brexit. As Elisabeth visits The Maltings Care Providers Plc., she mourns for the care assistants. Being a young aspirant, whose dreams have been frustrated by Britain's withdrawal of membership from the EU, she naturally views the other side of the coin:

Elisabeth wonders what is going to happen with all the care assistants. She realizes she has not so far encountered a single care assistant here who isn't from somewhere else in the world. (Smith, 2016, p. 111)

Elisabeth laments the shattering of dreams of millions of students who have become victims of depression and bewilderment because of the current socio-political situation. Smith's narrative also draws attention to the immigrants' exclusion from NHS facilities. In July 2016, immediately after the Referendum when Elisabeth visits the clinic, where her mother was registered as a patient, she is told that her mother is no longer listed on the patient list for confidential reasons which the receptionist is not permitted to share with Elisabeth.

The novel critiques the all-pervasive capitalistic ambience which has distorted Elisabeth's surname "de monde" into 'Demand' and which negates the cosmopolitan outlook and promotes mercantile culture. The officer's recommendation of a particular studio Snappy Snaps and the post office's conversion into designer chain stores are markers of a society dedicated to Mammon worship.

Contemporary Britain is poles apart from inculcating cultural conviviality. Rather, the national media openly encourages just the opposite of it. Elisabeth hears a spokesperson on the radio openly advocating:

It's not just that we have been rhetorically and practically encouraging the opposite of integration for immigrants to this country. It's that we've been rhetorically and practically encouraging ourselves not to integrate . . . Thatcher taught us to be selfish and not just to think but to believe that there's no such thing as society . . . Your time is over. Democracy. You lost. (Smith, 2016, p. 111-112)

As stated at the beginning of this paper, Elisabeth- Daniel friendship stands most prominent in the texture of the rich novel. Daniel-Elisabeth asexual relationship is also a blow to the essential sexual basis of heterosexual love relationship. *Autumn*, along with a new definition of inclusive Englishness, also redefines love. Elisabeth and Daniel's world glitters with mutual trust, selfless love, and a new definition of neighbours and neighbourhood. Daniel invites us to be a member of the institute called collage: "Collage is an institute of education where all the rules can be

thrown into the air, and size and space and time and foreground and background all become relative" (Smith, 2016, p. 71-72). Through Daniel, Smith invites us to redefine national identity, citizenship, and belongingness. Smith advocates an Englishness which like Daniel's painting bristling with multi-coloured images, will be inclusive. The novel urges "to welcome people into the home of your story" (119). The painted tree with bright red flowers with the caption, "we are already home. Thank you" (Smith, 2016, p. 138) redefines a new sense of belongingness. Elisabeth and Daniel's world is rich with the promises of a new message of belongingness.

Elisabeth-Daniel friendship is anchored in a common cosmopolitan outlook. Elisabeth's nightmarish vision of an all-white ambience and Daniel's desperate attempt to make it colourful is significant:

He is peeling a white-orange with a white pen knife. The scroll of peel falls into the whiteness like into deep snow and disappears. . . He pulls straight out of his chest, of his collarbone, like a magician, a free floating mass of the colour orange. . . The white orange in his hand becomes its natural colour. . . . (Smith, 2016, p. 39)

The excerpt unambiguously communicates the stance of the author and Daniel. The all-white ambience is unnatural, and repulsive to both of them. Hence Daniel is impatient with this all-white aura and is desperate to make it colourful. A certain group of people gets scared at Daniel's "ability to change things" (Smith, 2016, p. 40) and starts vilifying and demonizing him:

The comments get more and more unpleasant. They start to make a sound like a hornet mass and Elisabeth notices that what looks like excrement is spreading very close to her bare feet. She tries not to step in any of it. She calls to Daniel to watch where he steps too. (Smith, 2016, p. 40)

Very Subtly, Smith introduces reversely the infamous, oft-used rhetoric of the pure white home spaces being polluted through human excreta of the invading immigrants. Elisabeth's identification and forewarning align her with the author and Daniel.

3. Conclusion

The above discussion reflects that the Brexit Referendum result is no contingent snapshot of British public mood, rather it's symptomatic of British (better to say, English) people's loss of confidence in cosmopolitanism. The novel urges that in the present ambience of global interdependencies, anti-cosmopolitanism spells anti-nationalism. Elisabeth-Daniel friendship communicates that cosmopolitan outlook is a prerequisite for resisting the neo-national reflex to erect fences. The title, 'Autumn' presages a decaying and decayed state of existence preceding death, the winter. Nevertheless, the titles of Smith's quartet suggest a cyclical order of time and life. Situating the course of events in the process of eternity, the author keeps faith in the restorative power of time and hopes that such a hard time will end: "Again. That's the thing about things. They fall apart, always have, always will, it's in their nature" (Smith, p. 03). The word 'again' and the immediate cluster of words "that's the thing about things. They fall apart, always have, always will, it's in their nature" (Smith, 2016, p. 03) with their philosophical overtone try to analyse the present political turmoil with the hope of tiding over such a trifling, disruptive, disturbing phase of human civilization. Fall is a reality of life but in a Keatsian vein, it is pregnant with

restorative promises. Hence, *Autumn* is optimistic in its approach and differs from the dystopian novels on Brexit.

Even if there is no authorial intrusion in the narrative, a close reading of the text reveals that the writer is a pro-Remain, and the personal and the political are interwoven. Ali Smith is openly an upholder of the "salad bowl" theory. A cosmopolitan, Smith believes in the co-existence of differences, and the chorus "how many worlds can you hold in a hand/ In a handful of sand" (p. 56) reflects her worldview. Elisabeth's assertion, "he's not foreign" (p. 45) offers a new definition of belongingness. Just below "GO HOME" someone has painted a tree with bright red flowers and inscribed "WE ARE ALREADY HOME. THANK YOU" (Smith, 2016, p. 138). This can be interpreted as an attempt to resist anti-immigrant toxicity and celebrate the long-cherished multi-cultural identities. The novel is a celebration of cosmopolitanism and it urges us to break out of narcissistic nationalism and embrace cosmopolitanism. The novel's message is to be located in Daniel's advice to Elisabeth:

And whoever makes up the story makes up the world . . . So always try to welcome people into the home of your story. (Smith, 2016, p. 119)

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