British Isolation and Social Fragmentation in Ali Smith's Winter 2017: A Constructivist Reading of Post-Brexit Britain*

Researcher: Ahmed Abdel-Fattah Eid[1] Prof. Dr. Marwan Kadhim Mohammed[2]
ahm24a2006@uoanbar.edu.iq ed.marwan.kazem@uoanbar.edu.iq
[1, 2] University of Anbar- College of Arts

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Abstract:

This paper examines the fragmentation within British families and their social alienation in the context of Brexit. By analyzing Ali Smith's Winter (2017), this research paper explores how Brexit contributes to social division and alienation in post-Brexit Britain. However, this article investigates the impact of Brexit on British identity that leads to emotional and social estrangement within British society. By focusing on Smith's Winter, this paper explores the fractures within the Cleves as a microcosm of broader social cleavages. Therefore, this study demonstrates that British identity cannot be homogeneous or stable in isolation from its relationship with the 'other'; through constructive dialogue based on respect for differing viewpoints and human connections, Ali Smith highlights the possibility of reshaping a British identity that is more cohesive and inclusive of diversity and difference, moving beyond racist and inflammatory rhetoric.

Keywords: British Identity, Fragmentation, Brexit, Winter, Social Alienation.

العزلة البريطانية والتفكك الاجتماعي في رواية الشتاء 2017 لـ آلى سميث: قراءة بنائية لبريطانيا ما بعد خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي

الباحث: أحمد عبد الفتاح عيد[1] أ. د. مروان كاظم محمد[2]
جامعة الانبار – كلية الآداب

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية التفكك داخل الأسر البريطانية وعزلتها الاجتماعية في سياق خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي (بريكست). من خلال تحليل رواية "الشتاء" (2017) للكاتبة آلى سميث، تستكشف هذه الورقة البحثية كيف يُسهم بريكست في الانقسام الاجتماعي والعزلة في بريطانيا ما بعد

(*) البحث مستل من رسالة ماجستير.

البريكست. مع ذلك، تبحث هذه المقالة في تأثير بريكست على الهوية البريطانية، والذي يؤدي إلى شعور بالاغتراب العاطفي والاجتماعي في داخل المجتمع البريطانية. بالتركيز على رواية سميث "الشتاء"، تستكشف هذه الورقة البحثية التصدعات داخل عائلة كليفز كنموذج مصغر لانقسامات اجتماعية أوسع. لذلك، تُبين هذه الورقة البحثية أن الهوية البريطانية لا يمكن أن تكون متجانسة أو مستقرة بمعزل عن علاقتها بـ"الآخر"؛ فمن خلال حوار بنّاء قائم على احترام وجهات النظر المختلفة والروابط الإنسانية، تُسلط آلي سميث الضوء على إمكانية إعادة تشكيل هوية بريطانية أكثر تماسكًا وشمولًا للتنوع والاختلاف، متجاوزةً الخطاب العنصري والتحريضي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية البريطانية، التشرذم، خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي، الشتاء، الاغتراب الاجتماعي.

1. Introduction

Brexit is a compound of two words: 'Britain' and 'Exit'. It is a crucial event in modern British history. The referendum was held on 23 June 2016. According to it, Britain voted on whether to leave or remain in the European Union. This vote created a severe crisis within Britain. It raised hostile and political rhetoric against ethnic minorities, refugees, and between supporters and opponents of Brexit(1). However, literature not only reflects this political crisis but also engages extensively with it. It interprets its consequences on British national identity. Winter (2017) is the second installment of Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet. The novel delves into the British family and explores the broader questions of identity, social division, and human relationships. It is set during a Christmas gathering in Sophia's house in Cornwall and reveals the social distance among the family members. Smith utilizes the Cleves as a microcosm of divided Britain. Lux, the enigmatic Croatian girl, gets into the family and pretends to be Art's girlfriend. However, she exposes the social division within Cleves' family and prompts characters to reexamine their ideological and political perspectives. Through the divergent perspectives of Sophia and Iris, Smith reveals the profound division in British identity fueled by the Brexit referendum. Smith employs Lux to reconstruct the fractured relationship between sisters with different viewpoints, moving beyond exclusionary boundaries and populist rhetoric.

Furthermore, Ali Smith is one of the first writers to address this crisis in her seasonal quartet, particularly in the novel Winter, where she illuminates

the impact of Brexit on British identity and the psychological and social transformations that accompanied it. Nevertheless, past studies have examined Ali Smith's Winter from different perspectives and linked it to Brexit. Still, there is a need to explore how Smith's novel reveals the fractures of social and familial ties and their impact on Britishness. From a constructivist perspective, identity is not a fixed construction but is reshaped through social interaction and shared meaning with the Other(2). 1

For instance, Lux reconnects the disrupted dialogue within the Cleves, evoking art and Shakespeare's Cymbeline. In the narrative, characters struggle to find meaning for their emotional and psychological alienation. Smith seeks to reconnect the fragments of the family bonds.

Finally, this study seeks to examine how the novel reconnects with Britishness by embracing shared ideas among family members and a mutual recognition of differing perceptions. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to connect literary representation with contemporary socio-political realities. By overlapping family fragmentation and Brexit-related anxieties, this paper provides a clear understanding of how literature addresses the social and political aspects of Brexit in Britain and its repercussions on British identity.

2. Literature Review:

Academic discussions about Brexit and its consequences on British society are increasingly associated with social and political transformation. Researchers argue that Brexit not only produced a political crisis but also led to cultural and psychological effects reflected in contemporary literature. However, recent studies discuss Ali Smith's Winter as a depiction of ideological polarization and the erosion of social connections. Most recent research papers examine the novel through the lens of "Brexit Literature." Researchers such as Pittel (2018) and Wietmann (2020) explain Winter as a significant work of fiction that documents the ideological divisions in post-referendum Britain. However, there is a remarkable discrepancy in how these divisions are assessed(3). On the one hand, Dobrogoszcz (2021) argues that Smith focuses on the 'marginalisation of the otherness', highlighting the destructive effects of populism on social bonds(4). Conversely, Byrne (2020) suggests that the novel's 'seasonal' structure offers a path towards renewal, linking political crisis with feminist and ecocritical resilience(5).

A divergent view is focused on the ethics of hospitality. For instance,

Bernard (2024) illustrates Smith's use of art to facilitate " re-aestheticized body politic" that transgresses political narratives[6].

This view is contested by Bényei (2024), who regards Smith's exotic aesthetic interventions, such as the imagined head floated in the air, not merely as an instrument of salvation, but as a "symptomatic displacement" of national wounds[7]. Moreover, Montesdeoca Cubas (2019) examines regimes of visibility, arguing that Smith's ethical project is fundamentally confined to those given a voice in the narrative[8].

Finally, other studies discuss environmental issues in Smith's Seasonal Quartet. Liu (2024) argues that winter contributes to the development of environmental thought by framing environmental protection as a spiritual and political choice[9]. This idea is supported by Wu (2021), linking the seasonal cycle of Smith's novels to adaptation to climate change[10]. However, while these studies provide an analytical view, focusing on the ethical crisis of Brexit and the political environment in Smith's Winter, they often overlook how Smith exposes a broader disruption in the British family, leading to social and emotional detachment within the family. By adopting Alexander Wendt's concept of 'relational identity', the study demonstrates how Smith utilizes Cleves' fractured ties as a microcosm of Britain, exposing the fractures of their emotional and social bonds.

3. Discussion:

3.1 The British Family as a Mirror of British Fractures

The novel demonstrates the state of stagnation in Britain, in which winter is not depicted as background, but a symbol of social paralysis that prevails in society. Through Cleves' family, Smith manifests social alienation and the break of familial bonds due to Brexit. In the narrative context, Sophia's house is a microcosm of Britain. The house with its cold walls and fifteen empty rooms represents the epoch in which Britain turns inward and closes its borders. This event was not only a geopolitical issue but also an event that ignited a long-term conflict and divided British society. This stagnation is evident in the strained relationship between Sophia and Iris as both cling to their own perspectives on Brexit and other political issues. For instance, Sophia defines herself by rejecting everything Iris represents, such as openness and political activism, while Sophia views Iris as a relic of a past that must be overcome.

This dynamic exemplifies the loss of familial bonds, as individuals cease to

see each other beyond ideological perspectives, transforming the home into a space of "relational isolation" that mirrors the biting cold of winter outside. The novel begins by dismaying the reader, illustrating the collapse of British society, as Smith explains that "God was dead: to begin with .Poetry was dead .Chivalry was dead .And romance was dead. Painting, the novel, they were all dead, and art was dead"(11).

By expressing the disintegration of these common cultural foundations, Smith illustrates a community that has become disconnected. The announcement of death at the beginning of the novel refers to the disruption of society. All beautiful images of love, poetry, and art have vanished. In this regard, Smith positions the reader in scenes where everything that once advocates for beauty and love is now fractured. However, through these emotionally charged moments, Smith reveals that the loss of human connection in a society eroded his aesthetic foundations. Through discussion within the narrative, Smith intensifies the fragmentation of Britishness, concentrating on British memory of post-
1945 and characters' memories. Nevertheless, the contradiction between Sophia and Iris represents two conflicting versions of "Englishness," as noted by Bényei (2024), that:

> Through the flashbacks, it is possible to reconstruct a partial history of post-1945 Britain [...] The novel evokes this specific historical crisis within the post-Brexit referendum context of the contrast between English isolationism and a more cosmopolitan view of Englishness(12).

This historical background indicates the complicated relationship between sisters. On one hand, Sophia embodies a form of English separatism, an independent identity that favors the past and prefers isolation. On the other hand, Iris reflects a cosmopolitan outlook. She helps refugees in Greece and protests the use of nuclear weapons. The Brexit vote shapes her relational identity with her sister. Iris's humanistic outlook is sharply contrasted with her sister Sophia. She rejects the racist discourse of Sophia, which is fueled by political remarks, and supports the Remain campaign. These divergent views depict post-Brexit Britain as internally divided into two opposing parties. In this regard, Sophia withdraws into her social isolation and clings to her prejudices, and Iris connects with the external world and rejects her sister's

racist rhetoric towards refugees.

Metaphorically, the imagined head floating in Sophia's room serves as a powerful manifestation of an acute disconnection from her surroundings and social life. This haunting image is not merely a psychological symptom of hallucination, but a representation of an internal division she has experienced. Moreover, the separation of the head from its body may also refer to a nation that detaches from "Europe", revealing a sense of uncertainty and hesitation left behind by Brexit: "It was the head of a child, just a head, no body attached, floating by itself in mid air."(13)

Similarly, the head depicts the post-Brexit climate. For Sophia, it signifies the obsessive hallucination that she cannot relinquish, and the detachment of social reality. It is a reminder of guilt, something hidden. It follows her silently, much like the unresolved social tensions that haunt the British domestic sphere. In this metaphorical scene, the body represents the fractured nation disrupted by racism, isolation, and exclusion. However, it suggests that society undergoes a radical shift triggered by Brexit, leading to doubt and confusion. For instance, Sophia's direct communication with this object symbolizes the difficulty of getting true communication with others. The head is a constant reminder of something missing: the connection between people and society. This is what Bényei (2024) suggests: that the floating head serves to revive the metaphor of the body politic in the context of Brexit. By echoing Shakespeare's themes of sovereignty and alienation, Smith depicts the fractured relationship between the British 'self' and the 'other' European(14).

The head constantly watches Sophia; it revolves around her like a haunted past. It physically moves, drones, and talks to her. Alternatively, she communicates with it, treating it like "her very own Christmas infant"(15). Sophia's detachment reveals her disturbing psychological state. Instead of genuinely maintaining social connection with others, she retreats to self-imposed isolation. According to the constructivist premise, "the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature"(16).

In Sophia's case, the head becomes a silent other that reinforces her loneliness, indicating that when communication with the real world becomes useless, the self begins to form its own world. Although it is an inanimate object, Sophia imbues it with emotional significance, treating it as a human being rather than an abstract object. Instead of engaging in real communication, she constructs

an intersubjective bond with it to reinforce her social isolation. Thus, the head functions not only as a symbolic object but as a construct in which Sophia's emotions and perceptions are constantly produced and sustained.

However, the strained relationship between sisters demonstrates the disintegration of Britishness after Brexit. Their disagreement is not merely a personal argument but an embodiment of profound division in society, as both build their own perceptions of Brexit and their new social reality. While Sophia upholds a nationalist gaze regarding social class privilege, Iris tends to be more empathetic and altruistic towards vulnerable refugees and eliminates all forms of violence. Her sense of responsibility is confronted by Sophia, who realizes that Iris is "making nothing of her life."(17) This indicates that Sophia assesses her sister's success through a capitalist perspective rather than a human identity that is committed to ethical values in addressing social issues. Their interaction seems meaningless, as the two sisters fail to form mutual recognition.

Through their heated discussion, Sophia's discourse seems firmly grounded in capitalist ideology. Her evaluation indicates the influence of Brexit on her identity as one of its driving forces to pursue economic independence from the EU: "you can't call it living, since Iris and this bunch of foreigners and layabouts here are paying no rent to anyone"(18). Her socially detached perspective is articulated within a conservative and class-based worldview. From a capitalist perspective, she adopts a neoliberal tendency that values individuals according to their productivity and marginalizes those who are economically unproductive.

Consequently, Sophia's position reinforces a division of national identity that views any deviation from the capitalist status quo—whether by a migrant or a native citizen—as a threat to the nation's social and economic fabric. It results in minor changes in British economics and reveals the fallacy of this capitalist view.

This idea is taken into consideration by Sumption and Brindle in their article "Brexit Impact: Labour Market and Migration" (2025), suggesting that although it is difficult to assess the long-term effects of Brexit on migrants' position in the labour market, the early evidence shows that this policy produces minimal substantive shift. Instead of reducing reliance on migrant labour, the decline in migration from Europe has led to an increase in migration from outside the European Union that does not qualify for work

visas[19]. This finding indicates that this policy fails to achieve its intended objectives. Instead of achieving economic growth and financial stability, it changes the composition of migrant hand workers. Despite the adoption of this approach, it is still implacable and limited.

On the other hand, Arthur is mostly referred to as Art. He is Sophia's son; he runs the blog "Art in Nature." He travels to his mother's isolated house in Cornwall for the Christmas gathering. Similarly, he experiences a personal and professional crisis that leads him to break up his relationship with his girlfriend Charlotte and hire a Croatian girl named Lux. He represents a generation that is alienated from his social world and struggles to find meaning in a world preoccupied with social media and political discourses. His inability to confront his mother reflects the fragility of human relationships in the aftermath of Brexit, and his journey is an attempt to reconstruct his identity and reconnect with his mother and his aunt Iris. Further, his social alienation is aggravated by his emotional disconnection from his mother, Sophia. Because he is afraid to conceal his emotional failure, he hires a Croatian girl, Lux, to impersonate Charlotte, his ex-friend, during the family Christmas holiday. This act demonstrates the fragility of Britishness, illustrating social pressure and forging the truth.

Iris, Sophia's sister, presents another divergent view in the novel. She is an aging political activist and the moral compass that resists Sophia's conservative view. She represents the moral conscience in the novel and a rebellious spirit against political and environmental issues. Through Iris, Smith provides a vision of reconciliation and the possibility of overcoming racist perspectives and embracing humanity.

Through the narrative's retrospective, Iris is depicted as an anti-war activist whose participation in protests against nuclear weapons demonstrates her extreme objection to militarism and political violence. Her decision to purchase a coat for an anti-nuclear demonstration provokes intense social and ideological division in British society. She condemns violent acts and environmental destruction in front of her father's guests, holding them responsible for the deaths of "two hundred thousand people […] in our name"[20]. Her cited biblical commandment, "thou shalt not kill," immediately indicates how moral dissent is silenced when it destabilizes the dominant social values.

Drawing on a constructivist perspective, this conflict reveals the contest

between identities rather than simply personal disagreement: the moral and human identity adopted by Iris and the aggressive identity that shaped her father's perception. In such a case, "the structure of human association is determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces"(21).

Consequently, this creates a rift between two competing perspectives: one rooted in violence, authority, and social conformity, and the other in which Iris constructs her identity around ethical responsibility and resistance to institutional violence. Thus, this incident demonstrates that identity is not fixed but constantly reshaped and contested through social interaction. Furthermore, Sophia's dialogue with Lux signifies another dimension of racist discourse. Her remark about Lux's face as being "full of little holes,"(22) reveals her nationalistic enclosure that dehumanizes the 'Other' by fixating on physical differences and perceived flaws. Furthermore, her blunt declaration is "unwelcome you are here [...] I'm unusually busy this Christmas and won't have time for entertaining guests"(23). In this regard, Sophia's house is not perceived as a place of hospitality, but an impregnable fortress that rejects strangers. Her excuse that she is "unusually busy" serves as nationalist rhetoric that denies communication and chooses to be enclosed.

In contrast to Sophia's ideological perspective, Lux is a brilliant Croatian girl whom Art hires to pose as his estranged girlfriend Charlotte. She embodies a moral pillar that resists Sophia's materialistic outlook and her class-based prejudice. She takes the role of mediator, seeking to bridge the emotional and ideological fractures within the household, symbolizing a restorative force. She encounters Sophia's hostile comments with remarkable composure. When Sophia suggests that Lux "sleep in the barn rather than the house", Lux's simple reply, "Anywhere will do," subtly challenges the exclusionary logic. Through Lux, Smith suggests that Lux undermines the exclusionary logic embedded in Sophia's discourse by refusing to measure dignity or belonging according to material status or social hierarchy. In this regard, "Lux tends to eschew fanaticism and eradicate ethnic divisions in an attempt to emphasize the determinants of the twenty-first-century multiculturalism and subjecthood"(24).

According to the constructivist approach, social identities are reshaped by interactions and practices between the Self and the Other(25). In such cases, the interactions between Sophia and Lux are mutual interactions that determine their identities. Their constant dialogue is not merely an exchange of

viewpoints, but a space in which identity is formed and contested. Through interaction, Sophia constructs herself as superior, dominant, and adherent to a privileged social class, defining Lux within a hierarchical framework to ensure the persistence of her superior self-identity.

However, this class-based classification, according to Wendt, cannot be formed solely by oneself or omit the Other, but through a mutual relationship between the Self and the Other. Thus, Lux challenges these exclusionary discourses that attempt to reduce her identity to the other European. As a result, identity becomes a product of an ongoing process of negotiation, in which characters compete to define or determine their relationship. Within the context of Brexit, this idea manifests in political and media discourses that help reshape the British social structure, positioning the British self as a superior and distinct identity, where the traditional concept of the "family home" is employed as a powerful ideological tool to justify and entrench social, cultural, and political structures and hierarchies. This metaphor contributes to legitimizing the strict measures, and even violent behaviors, against groups classified as a threat to the stability and identity of this entity(26).

Therefore, this division between British and European identities is a product of political discourses that symbolically reinforce the boundaries between different cultural identities and introduce the exclusionist and racist discourse against the Other, transforming them into a threat to British identity.

Moreover, Art's social alienation indicates his withdrawal and his tendency to replace the uncomfortable family social reality. His reliance on Lux as a mediator to bridge the gap within his family exemplifies his unsuccessful attempts to reconnect with his mother emotionally and to go beyond his mother's expectations. In this respect, characters unable "to relate to the world, human and natural, in an authentic, affective way relates to the disintegration of family relations in Smith's story"(27). Therefore, characters in the novel appear fractured and disoriented from their social reality. To explain, Sophia, a retired businesswoman, feels detached and lonely even from her son, Arthur. This sense of familial disconnection is amplified with her sister Iris. However, Art attempts to bridge the gap between his mother, Sophia, and his aunt, Iris. He asks his mother, "Did I really spend quite a lot of time with your sister Iris

when I was small?" [28]. He attempts to reconstruct the disrupted ties within the family, which is devastated by past discord and the present crisis of Brexit. His effort is encountered by Sophia's rejection, who "makes a pff noise."

Instead of reconciliation, Sophia amplifies her social detachment from Iris, revealing the depth of their fractured relationship, as she asserts that Iris "didn't come home for years" and "wasn't welcome"[29], demonstrating the prolonged familial rupture. Furthermore, she forges the estrangement in a manner that assigns unilateral blame to her sister. Further, her description of Iris as a "hopeless mythologizer" sustains emotional distance and perpetuates the divisions that define their relationship. By belittling her sister, she tries to justify her sarcastic attitude and keep the class conflict within the family. Moreover, she invests in maintaining distance and reconstructing the past to perpetuate her familial isolation.

Symbolically, the table functions as a space where characters renegotiate their identities. For instance, Sophia represents an enclosed ego, constructing her identity through detachment. Sophia's interaction, particularly with her sister Iris, is articulated by her firm refusal to communicate with others. She seeks to protect herself through isolation and rejection of others. She avoids any encounters with her sister, perceiving Iris's intrusion as a threat to her personal authority and control. Symbolically, the Christmas Eve dining table signifies a space where characters negotiate their fragmented identities. The conversation around the table rearticulates their divergent narratives of the past, revealing conflicting claims of responsibility and different understandings of who belongs within the family. This exemplifies when "Iris goes through to the kitchen, his mother leans forward." Sophia asserts that his son "never lived with her"[30].

In this respect, characters attempt to assert their own narrative while challenging or dismissing the other, making the table a site of continuous negotiation over identity. Radwan demonstrates that Smith employs the Christmas Eve gathering to illustrate overlapping spaces, evoking emotional and moral responses to "utopian" desires to transcend selfishness, isolation, and a confused reality towards relationships based on interaction, tolerance, and cooperation[31]. These negotiations emulate the Brexit debates (2016-2020), during which the British government sought to redefine Britain's political policy and its future relationship with Europe. Just as Brexit is sparked by the notion of belonging, national identity, and sovereignty, the

negotiations around Sophia's table resemble a similar struggle to redefine their personal and familial identities. The intersection of private and public spaces, the table becomes an arena in which identities are contested and reconstructed.

Conversely, the ideological perspective creates a split in their family bonds. While their alienation may appear personal on the surface, it is deeply rooted in divergent political perceptions and interpretations of global issues. For instance, Iris, with her activist history of political action, adheres to collective ideals of cooperation and human issues.

On the other hand, Sophia represents a contradiction and a more conservative outlook, shaped by her professional success and her adherence to a pragmatic worldview. Their competing perspectives transform it into an extreme familial rupture. It becomes a space of conflicted values and generational gap, leading not only to emotional estrangement but also to ideological distance between them. When Arthur explains that they "haven't spoken to each other for nearly three decades"(32), he indicates the persistence of their social rupture. The collapse in communication between them reflects the erosion of their bonds. In addition, their mutual silence symbolizes unresolved tensions of the past. In the same context, Smith addresses the media discourse directed against non-British citizens and the discriminatory representations it entails. When the headline reports news:

> The next headline says that a poll has found that citizens of this country oppose a unilateral guarantee for the citizens who live here and who are originally from a lot of other countries to be able to stay here with full rights of residents after a certain date(33).

She illustrates how the public discourse perceives the "other" as an existential threat to Britishness, and points out the racist words that prevail in society, such as "Panic. Attack. Exclude.", which captures the abrupt and reactionary shift in British social structure, suggesting the fear and suspicion that is increasingly reshaping British consciousness. From this perspective, Duistermaat (2021) argues that the social schism between the sisters is not merely a family feud but rather an accurate representation of the Leave and Remain campaigns(34). In the narrative context, Sophia embraces the logic of the Leave Campaign. She clings to the slogan "Take Back Control" to assert her superiority over others, even over her sister. On the other hand, Iris represents advocates for human equality and rejects this racist discourse.

Further, he explains that Brexit was not only the motive for this conflict but also a catalyst for a long-standing political and ideological rift that stretches back to their youth, making their relationship a historical and enduring embodiment of national polarization.

The social fragmentation is evident in the harsh reality experienced by migrants, particularly Lux. She indicates that "The only room I'm used to hearing people talk about is the no room, the no more room."(35) She observes that the hostile environment of Brexit is no longer welcoming the European. In addition, Sophia's reply that "It's sad but true, […] There is no more room," reveals that Brexit reconfigures Britishness, fostering exclusionary discourses and an inhospitality crisis.

In contrast to her sister's gaze, Iris embodies the moral and human dimension, exposing the fragile discourse of Sophia. Sophia's nationalist view is sharply contrasted with Iris's perspective. She confronts her exclamation by demonstrating that "businesswoman who lives alone in a house that has fifteen bedrooms"(36). In the charged moment, the dialogue between them tends to be a discussion about Brexit, revealing Sophia's deep-seated argument against migrants and refugees:

> The so-called vote, his mother says, was a vote to free our country from inheriting the troubles of other countries, as well as from having to have laws that weren't made here for people like us by people like us(37)

Through this verbal manipulation, Smith argues that a "so-called vote" creates a rift in social compassion, leading to social racism. Furthermore, words like 'freedom' are manipulated to serve an exclusionary political rhetoric against the "other". In this situation, Sophia justifies her social isolation and the superiority of Britishness when she refers to "people like us". She transforms the act of voting into a means of glorifying national self-interest and excluding the "other," whose problems are viewed as a contagion to be eradicated. The character's manipulation of the language stems from their propensity to conceive of alternative realities that challenge and transcend existing conditions(38). However, this ideological debate transcends the political dimension by rejecting Sophia's exclusionary rhetoric. Iris argues: "Depends whether you think there's them and an us, […] given that DNA's let us know we're all pretty much"(39), which resists the classifications set by political discourse.

The interaction between characters demonstrates how Brexit extends beyond debates over laws and borders, revealing a deeper social rift within British identity. Within this context, Sophia's refusal to engage with others, expressed through her belief that Britain is "inheriting the troubles of other countries," exposes a moral failure in which compassion is perceived as weakness and solidarity as a threat rather than a shared human responsibility.

From a contrasting perspective, Lux is a "catalyst" who exposes the profound schism within the Cleves' household. She interrogates Sophia's exclusionist logic, asking, "What's wrong with people wanting better lives, Mrs Cleves?" She addresses the plight of a million homeless people by saying, "go away and building fences and walls?". In this respect, Lux functions as a mirror in which Sophia and Iris perceive different attitudes, exposing the illusion of an idealized British identity. As Wendt (1999) explains, the "Other" becomes a mirror in which the "Self" perceives itself and behaves according to it(40). In this regard, Lux reveals the profound fractures within Britishness through different attitudes: Sophia's isolationist discourse and Iris's humanist inclusiveness.

Likewise, the inclusion of Barbara Hepworth and her creative art in the novel. She grants a renowned voice to female artists who are historically marginalized in the British canon. Smith presents Hepworth's art as a vital social document that persists even in the atrocities of political discourse. When discussing a piece of Hepworth's work, Sophia remarks: "He had a piece of her sculpture at his house, I saw it. Really it was just two round stones. But they were strikingly beautiful stones."(41) This is significant because it reveals how Smith intersects literature with art, making literature a medium for aesthetic works of female artists. Bernard (2024) suggests that, by engaging with the affective politics of nature and drawing on the artistic legacy of British artists such as Barbara Hepworth and Tacita Dean, Smith evolves a poetic framework centered on transformation and the possibility of a renewed collective vision(42). In this way, Smith's engagement with artistic and natural imagery explains the transformative power of imagination.

Ultimately, Smith demonstrates that art is a vital social document; it is the "voice" that persists when political discourse fails, offering a path toward breaking the walls of isolation. This idea is further extended by Lux, who plays the role of "actress". She constructs a performative identity, just like Shakespeare's plays, that addresses issues of deception, disguise, and the

reshaping of truth. In this context, Lux exposes the fragility of national identity that can be reimagined due to contemporary shifts and social crises. She reconnects the past with the present, revealing the fractures within the Cleves' family. In doing so, Lux asserts that identity is not a predetermined social construct but can be reshaped through dialogue between contested identities. She finds a glimpse of hope in the play's conclusion, where "the balance comes back, and all the lies are revealed, and all the losses are compensated"(43). By discussing Shakespeare's Cymbeline, Smith suggests that reconciliation within the fractured family can be restored when "all lies are revealed," thereby restoring moral and social equilibrium. Thus, Lux's re-enactment of a Shakespearean play indicates that " emotional and political chaos is resolved into a harmony that is aesthetic as much as political"(44).

3 Conclusion:

This paper concludes that Smith's Winter (2017) is not only a depiction of social and cultural fragmentation, but a profound criticism of Brexit discourse. By focusing on the fractured nature of Cleves' family, Smith portrays the broader division of British national identity. By drawing on the constructivist perspective, this paper argues that British identity is not fixed but is reshaped through interaction between the self and the other.

Instead of depicting these divisions as inevitable consequences of Brexit rhetoric, Smith reconstructs British identity and reveals the inherent contradictions that undermine empathy, coexistence, and social cohesion. However, Lux introduces the moral and solidarity example, reconstructing the disrupted dialogue within the Cleves' family.

Finally, this paper finds that Smith challenges the exclusionary discourse, demonstrating that British identity cannot be cohesive or homogeneous by excluding other perspectives. The novel presents a harsh critique of Post-Brexit Britain, giving prominence to ethical dialogue, solidarity, and shared humanity.

Footnotes:

(1) Ford, Robert, and Matthew Goodwin, Britain After Brexit: A Nation Divided, Journal of Democracy, Volume 28, Issue 1, 2017, p. 1. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0002

(2) Wendt, Alexander. Social Theory of International Politics, 1st ed., Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 1.

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