

Intertextuality and the Plea for Plurality in Ali Smith's *Autumn*

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Annick Smithers

6268218

Supervisor: Simon Cook

Second reader: Cathelein Aaftink

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### Abstract

This thesis analyses the way in which intertextuality plays a role in Ali Smith's *Autumn*. A discussion of the reception and some readings of the novel show that not much attention has been paid yet to intertextuality in *Autumn*, or in Smith's other novels, for that matter. By discussing different theories of the term and highlighting the influence of Bakhtin's dialogism on intertextuality, this thesis shows that both concepts support an important theme present in *Autumn*: an awareness and acceptance of different perspectives and voices.

Through a close reading, this thesis analyses how this idea is presented in the novel. It argues that *Autumn* advocates an open-mindedness and shows that, in the novel, this is achieved through a dialogue. This can mainly be seen in scenes where the main characters Elisabeth and Daniel are discussing stories. The novel also shows the reverse of this liberalism: when marginalised voices are silenced. Subsequently, as the story illustrates the state of the UK just before and after the 2016 EU referendum, *Autumn* demonstrates that the need for a dialogue is more urgent than ever.

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## Introduction

Ali Smith's *Autumn* was published in 2016, only four months after the EU referendum, when the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union. This resulted in an unusually contemporary novel and a "sort of time-sensitive experiment" (Smith, *I*). It is the first novel in a series about the seasons, with each novel published only very shortly after it was written, ensuring that each would be about its own time and "the place where time and the novel meet" (Smith, *I*). *Autumn* tells the story of the friendship between thirty-two-year-old Elisabeth Demand and 101-years old Daniel Gluck. It is told through memories of their friendship and their meetings in the present, during which Elisabeth visits Daniel who is lying comatose in a care home.

At the same time, *Autumn* illustrates the state of the UK, characterising it as a divided country where xenophobia is expressed freely and a time during which "the end of dialogue" seems to be the defining feature (Smith, *Autumn* 112). The novel also evokes 1960s Britain through pop art artist Pauline Boty and the contemporaneous Profumo Scandal. There are also many allusions to fictional stories like classic works of literature, making this a highly intertextual novel. It is this aspect of the novel that this paper will focus on. I hope to show that the notions of intertextuality and dialogism support an important theme in *Autumn*, as Smith utilises them to advocate an acceptance of a plurality of voices and perspectives. In turn, the novel shows that this is only possible with a dialogue and demonstrates the need for one in the present political time of the novel.

A brief overview of how the novel was received in both the literary and academic world will show what critics have highlighted but also point out what many have not gone into much depth about. This paper will focus on the various instances of intertextuality in the novel, in particular, the many allusions to other texts and works of art. The story of British pop artist Pauline Boty will be discussed as well, which will also raise the issue of a cultural

canon. In the second part of this analysis, I will discuss how a dialogue can lead to this awareness and acceptance towards different voices in the novel. To demonstrate this, I will analyse scenes with conversations between Daniel and Elisabeth. The last part of this close reading will focus on the way in which the novel shows the consequences of a lack of dialogue and the silencing of certain voices, as well as the importance of it in the context of Brexit.

Underpinning this close reading is a discussion of different theories of intertextuality that are useful for this reading of *Autumn*. In particular, Bakhtin's dialogism will prove to be an important concept in this interpretation. As Graham Allen points out, many works on this topic are entitled "'An Intertextual Study of...'" or "'Intertextuality and ...'", which suggests that the term "provides a stable set of critical procedures for interpretation", which is certainly not the case (2). This will then, accordingly, not be an intertextual study of *Autumn* and it will not attempt to provide all the instances in which the existence of other texts within the novel are highlighted. Rather, intertextuality provides a useful frame to look at an important theme in *Autumn*.

### “A Brexit Novel”

The academic discussion on *Autumn* is not yet extensive. The book was, however, well-received by critics as it was nominated for the Booker Prize shortlist. Many reviewers call *Autumn* a “Brexit novel”, thereby emphasising its political context (e.g. Gilbert, Kavenna, Lyall). Sophie Gilbert writes that Smith reveals “the beauty and the humanity buried deep below the surface” during “the catastrophe and wreckage of a fraught historical moment”, and Sarah Lyall writes that “ill will and menace hang thick in the air”. This politically tumultuous time is placed in a prominent position by these reviewers.

Critics have also highlighted the importance of people’s experience of time. Lucy Scholes writes that “in *Autumn*, time is something the warp and weft of which can be bent on a whim: past, present and strange timeless limbos exist alongside each other”. The shifting between past and present, then, reflects the way in which people experience time, but Daniel’s surreal dream episodes are dispersed throughout the novel as well. This disjointed experience of time also points to the transience of life, according to Joanna Kavenna. She writes that Smith illustrates that life is brief, and yet people “are trammelled by external edicts, forced to spend their time earning minimal wages, measuring passport photographs with a ruler”. In the critical reception of the book, much attention has been paid to the way Smith plays with time and the way in which the fictional present is represented.

In a collection on literature’s response to Brexit, Petra Rau writes that *Autumn* is “like a long and slow contemplation of an enormous collage of scenes and images about our moment” which “contributed to the ‘structure of feeling’ that is ‘now’” (42). She focusses on the ways in which Smith inserts different stories, from both past and present, to illustrate and make sense of the current time in the UK. In emphasising the importance of these stories, Rau shows how the past plays a role in the present. In the same collection, Kristian Shaw shows that Smith embeds “the contemporaneous events of the EU referendum within a wider

cyclical process of British history and natural decline” (21). He highlights the cyclical nature of time and shows that the present, political context is set against past, political moments in history, like the Profumo Scandal in 1963.

Johannes Wally, in an article on recent political fiction, points out that “Brexit as a topic is alluded to, rather than addressed directly” (77). He nevertheless argues that *Autumn* is about political identity, thereby emphasising the role of Brexit in the way in which characters establish their identity. For example, Elisabeth arranging a new passport can be seen as an attempt “at establishing an identity in relation to a superordinate entity”, which mirrors the UK’s need to establish its identity in relation to the EU (78).

Wally’s argument also pertains to the importance of time, and he writes that “a nostalgic evocation of the ‘good old days’” (79) in *Autumn* functions as a defence mechanism in the fictional present. This nostalgia “manifests itself predominantly in the evocation of the paintings and life of the only female British Pop art painter Pauline Boty” (79). Nostalgia is also apparent in the antiques obsession of Elisabeth’s mother for instance, but the inclusion of Pauline Boty’s story, which Wally leaves undiscussed, is significant in revealing that her merit as a pop art artist had been largely forgotten until the 1990s. The evocation of the story and the paintings of Pauline Boty hint at the role of intertextuality in the book.

Previous research on Ali Smith’s work has highlighted her preoccupation with ‘the other’. Monica Germanà writes that “the attention to the other story throughout Smith’s fiction is both a thematic and a formal feature that reveals political and ethical implications” (100). In most of her works, Smith is concerned with a plurality of voices, and Daniel Lea writes that her work tends “to be constructed as duologues or multilogues, with characters’ differing version of the world built around shared events” (2). This plurality of perspectives is important in *Autumn* as well and becomes apparent through instances of intertextuality. The notion has not been addressed much in discussion of Smith’s work. Germanà mentions the

term once in her discussion of Smith's oeuvre and briefly describes it, within parentheses, as "(echoing other texts)" (99). This gap in the discussion of Smith's work needs filling, and by focussing on different interpretations of the term, I will argue that it highlights the importance of a plurality of perspectives and voices in *Autumn*.

### Dialogism and Intertextuality

*Autumn* conjures up many different stories. Even before the novel starts, Smith has referred to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and poetry by John Keats and W.S. Graham. The opening sentence of *Autumn* alludes to Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and throughout the novel, Elisabeth Demand reads Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Furthermore, the novel evokes many news stories from both the past and the present, referring to the world outside of the text. However, intertextuality plays an important role in the novel in less overt ways than these allusions and references. Tracing the origins and different theories of the term will demonstrate the importance of the concept in my reading of *Autumn*.

The discussion on intertextuality is extensive, as critics and theorists have different views of the term and its applicability to literary studies. Graham Allen writes that it is one of the most often "used and misused terms in contemporary critical vocabulary" (2). Indeed, as William Irwin writes in an article that reconsiders our notion of intertextuality, the term has the tendency to become "fashionable jargon for traditional notions such as allusion and source study" (229). The theory that is now most commonly used is attributed to Julia Kristeva, who was the first to use the term to refer to the idea that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 37). The terms that Irwin highlights, however, are part of Gérard Genette's set of more concrete concepts used to define intertextuality and are useful in understanding how the notion plays a role in the text. While, as Allen writes, there is no set of criteria and procedures that an intertextual study can follow, Genette's definition provides some concrete categories for the study of intertextuality, using terms such as allusion and quotation to show how it manifests in the text.

Genette distinguished five subcategories of what he termed transtextuality, which he defines as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other

texts” (Genette 1). He has a narrower definition of the term intertextuality – one of the subcategories – than other scholars, as he defines it as “the actual presence of one text within another”, which takes place in the form of quotation, allusion, and plagiarism (2). Genette’s subcategories for transtextuality provide definitions for practices which range from references, to epigraphs, to abstract generic conventions. Thus, *Autumn* is a highly intertextual text, as it provides many allusions, references, and epigraphs, as well as (cover) art and ekphrasis to refer to other works outside the text. These techniques are concrete ways in which Smith highlights the idea that theorists of intertextuality have argued, namely, that no text exists in isolation.

While Genette defined his transtextuality as ways in which the relationality of different texts can be found in a text, Julia Kristeva’s definition of intertextuality pertains to much more than that. Initially, the term was used by poststructuralists who wanted to abandon the notions of objectivity and stability in meaning and interpretations (Allen). Julia Kristeva was the first to use the term intertextuality for the idea that texts cannot exist in isolation from previous texts or as a self-sufficient whole (Still and Worton). She was influenced by the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure, who insisted that meaning is produced in language when we choose from a certain set of words and then combine these words (Allen). This makes language relational, as meaning is only derived from a combination of signs that are strung together. This can be seen as one of the origins of intertextuality and was, together with Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism, influential on Kristeva’s theory of the term (Allen). In my reading of *Autumn*, highlighting the influence of Bakhtin’s dialogism on intertextuality is particularly relevant, as it will emphasise not just the relationality of texts, but of every utterance.

Bakhtin believes the individual to be made up of their social surroundings. He claims that language reflects these social surroundings in which it is produced and “that

consciousness is a matter of dialogue and juxtaposition with a social ‘other’” (Alfaro 273). This relationality of the individual also applies to language. Any utterance derives “from already established patterns of meaning” which are recognisable to the sender and in turn adapted by the receiver (Allen 18). An utterance, then, is never understood in isolation from its social surroundings and is, therefore, never neutral. Utterances are dependent on previous utterances and on how the addressee receives them. They are dialogic: their meaning is “dependent upon what has previously been said and on how they will be received by others” (Allen 19). This view of language forms the basis for Bakhtin’s dialogism.

Bakhtin explained his dialogism particularly in the context of the novel, which, he claims, should be dialogic, incorporating multiple worldviews, perspectives and voices through different characters (Allen). Bakhtin argues that the novel is particularly suitable for representing this plurality of voices and that the author should strive for this dialogism and not just represent one authorial perspective. In other words, the author’s voice should disappear, and the characters should have their own perspectives, so that the novel represents a polyphony of voices. Dialogism, then, refers to the encountering of multiple discourses, each constituted of their individual social environments, and as “all discourses are interpretations of the world, responses to and calls to other discourses”, they are all intertextual (Allen 23).

Above all, dialogism acknowledges that no discourse is separate from the social dimensions in which it exists and, therefore, it recognises and acknowledges the multiplicity of discourses which, as Alfaro writes, is “a necessary multiplicity in human perception” (272). According to Bakhtin, “Our lives are surrounded by the echoes of a dialogue that undermines the authority of any single voice, a dialogue that takes place within the text, but which is, at the same time, a dialogue with all the voices outside it” (Alfaro 275). It is this recognition of a multiplicity of perspectives that is so important in *Autumn*.

Bakhtin's dialogism was influential on Julia Kristeva's intertextuality. In her interpretation of dialogism, she substituted Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic nature of the word with that of the text, and subsequently termed it intertextuality (Alfaro). Both theories emphasise the notion of plurality. Both show that no word or text exists in a vacuum and that there are always multiple aspects and interpretations of language. Allen writes that "Kristeva thus employs Bakhtin's emphasis on the doubleness or dialogic quality of words and utterances to attack notions of unity, which she associates with claims to authoritativeness, unquestionable truth, unproblematic communication and society's desire to repress plurality" (42). Kristeva, then, also used the notion to advocate plurality.

An important idea that follows from Kristeva's notion is the recognition of a plurality of perspectives. It is this view that forms an important theme in *Autumn*, as the novel highlights the relationality of voices and shows that every story has different sides. By hinting at different stories outside of the novel, *Autumn* demonstrates what theorists of intertextuality have argued: that there is no aspect of any text or story that exists in isolation.

With their emphasis on plurality, theories of intertextuality have failed, however, to include work from minorities. Gender issues have been neglected in the discussion of intertextuality, for which it has been criticised (Allen). Bakhtin himself did not include any research on novels from women writers or other minorities in his theory of dialogism (Allen). Alfaro writes that "an adequate theory of criticism can only be developed by fully considering the art produced by women, by working people and by national minorities" (282). This brings me to an important aspect of the novel: the focus on marginalised voices.

By definition, marginalised groups and individuals are not politically represented adequately and do not have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. They are "kept outside of mainstream social, epistemological and political life" (McHugh 78). With these theories of intertextuality governing my reading, I hope to show that *Autumn* advocates an

acknowledgment of a plurality of voices but also brings to light the consequences of silencing certain voices. The answer *Autumn* proposes is a dialogue.

### Intertextuality in *Autumn*

Through allusions, *Autumn* repeatedly makes the reader aware of the existence of other works of art and literature. During their conversations, Daniel and Elisabeth talk about “Books. Songs. Poets”, and mention, among others, Sylvia Plath, Bob Dylan and Keats (79). Elisabeth “gets her new/old book out” (112) when she reads Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and when she reads *Brave New World*, Daniel refers to it as “that old thing” to which she replies, “It’s new to me” (31). Similarly, Miranda from *The Tempest* is at one point reading *Brave New World*. Placing older stories in a new context and merging different fictional worlds results in seeing them in a new light and hints at the adaptability of stories. During one of their walks, Daniel and Elisabeth play a game where “you trifle with the stories that people think are set in stone” (117). This results in Elisabeth perceiving old stories in a new way. *Autumn* highlights the malleability of stories and shows that no work of art is a self-sufficient whole.

The role of intertextuality already becomes apparent before the book starts, with the cover. As with many of Smith’s books, the cover contains a piece of contemporary art. Smith stated that with this decision, she wants to remind the reader “to go beyond the book into all the arts, or to allow the book (as object) to cite itself as something equally informed by all the other arts” (Young 143). This immediately disrupts the notion of the book as a self-sufficient whole and situates the novel alongside other works of art.

The many epigraphs with which the novel starts also do this. These epigraphs refer to Shakespeare, Keats and W.S. Graham, as well as Ossie Clark and *The Guardian*. The juxtaposition of timeless quotes to a recent citation from a newspaper emphasises that the novel is as much shaped by a long literary tradition as by its contemporary context. Dougal McNeill argues that Smith’s use of epigraphs creates distraction as they lead the reader to ask themselves whether to look up the quotations. According to McNeill, this is a reflection of the

distracted reading practices of our age, created by “ever faster and more ephemeral output of the iPad, streaming service, or text message” (358). At the same time, epigraphs direct the reading of the novel and immediately hint at the intertextuality: “The epigraph, like the hyperlink, points elsewhere, outside the text and into other texts and other cultural and historical contexts. It acts as an implicit rebuke to the dream of the autonomous artwork or the self-contained aesthetic experience” (358). Through both the cover artwork and the use of epigraphs, *Autumn* alludes to the world beyond the book and shows it is situated in a wider literary context. Moreover, through these instances of intertextuality, the novel implies the reading experience of one novel can never be separate from both the contemporary and literary context in which it exists.

All these allusions to other works of art and literature form a collage, which is one way in which the painter Pauline Boty is placed in a prominent position. Boty was the only female founder of the British pop art movement. Her work was highly regarded and influential but after her death in 1966, her paintings disappeared. Thirty years later, her work was rediscovered and exhibited again, which “began the task of asserting Boty’s place in a canon from which, effectively she’d completely vanished” (Smith, *Ali*). Her work was not received well by everyone, as is also illustrated in *Autumn* by Elisabeth’s tutor: “What about the way she uses images as images? Elisabeth said. Oh God, everybody and his dog was doing that then, the tutor said” (154). Yet, Boty was the first to critique the use of gender in mass culture and centralise the representation of images (Smith, *Ali*).

Emphasising the fact that Boty’s paintings centralise representation – also shown by Elisabeth’s dissertation on “the representation of representation in Pauline Boty’s work” (156) – hints at the intertextual notion that no artwork is completely original or self-contained. In *Autumn*, many of Boty’s paintings are described in detail by Daniel. Like the paintings themselves, these descriptions are representations of images: “it’s a picture of a

picture of her. That's important to remember" (81). One of Boty's paintings described, *Scandal '63*, is a painting of a picture of Christine Keeler. The painting has disappeared but by describing it in detail, the fact that the artwork is about representation is emphasised.

An implication that follows from the practice of referencing other texts is that some readers will understand certain references while others will not, which makes the reading experience highly subjective. This form of intertextuality thus results in a limited set of texts to which authors refer, while most texts that are not part of a canon remain unacknowledged. By using Pauline Boty as an example of an artist who has been erased from a cultural canon, Smith shows the importance of being represented. Smith brings to light her work and sets it alongside classic British works of literature, as well as famous British pop artist David Hockney, thus reinserting Boty's work in a British cultural canon. Incidentally, Pauline Boty's position in the pop art world is reflected by the position of her painting in the book and reflects how she has been overshadowed by her male peers: on the cover is a painting by David Hockney, while a Boty painting is displayed on the inside of the book.

Reception of Boty's work was not always positive and sometimes focussed more on her gender than her art (Smith, *Ali*). This is exemplified by Elisabeth's tutor, who says that "there had never been such a thing as a female British Pop artist, not of any worth, which is why there were none recorded as more than footnotes in British Pop Art history" (150). By placing Pauline Boty in a prominent position in *Autumn*, Smith makes her more than a footnote. As Daniel says, "whoever makes up the story makes up the world" (119), *Autumn* shows that people who write history books have the power to decide who and what is represented, partly through a cultural canon which perpetuates the existence of certain texts. Intertextuality is one way in which this mainstream story is perpetuated; only the canonical works will be remembered and recognised. At the same time, intertextuality can also highlight other marginalised experiences, as *Autumn* does by including Boty's story.

## Dialogue

*Autumn* demonstrates the importance of a plurality of voices and perspectives through instances of intertextuality and, subsequently, shows that an awareness of this is achieved through a dialogue. In the story, this is shown through conversations between Daniel and Elisabeth. When Elisabeth visits Daniel at the care home, she sits by Daniel's bedside and refers to him as "Sleeping Socrates" (112). Daniel can be seen suggesting one of Socrates' philosophies. Most of our information about Socrates has been derived from the works of his student Plato, just as Elisabeth who learns much from Daniel. The method of elenchus is most often attributed to Socrates. This entails questioning someone's beliefs to expose inconsistencies and errors, which would lead to genuine understanding and eradicate false beliefs (Gagarin). Rather than a competition to establish who is right or wrong, it was supposed to be a co-operative effort (Honderich). It was, thus, a dialogue to critically scrutinise one's assumptions. Many of the conversations between Daniel and Elisabeth take the form of this Socratic dialogue.

During one of their walks, Elisabeth and Daniel play a game called Bagatelle, "a mere nothing" (116). During this game of Bagatelle, Daniel challenges Elisabeth's beliefs and teaches her about other perspectives. They have to invent a character to act in the story, so Elisabeth chooses a man with a gun while Daniel chooses a man in a tree costume. Elisabeth is confused about Daniel's choice of character as she had already decided the story would be about a war, and the man disguised as a tree would not be able to defend himself. Daniel, however, reminds Elisabeth that he has "some input into this story too" (119). The game shows Elisabeth that she has the power to make up the world of the story while Daniel critically questions her about the choices she makes about this world, to make her reconsider if this is "the kind of world you're going to make up" (119). Daniel makes her realise the effect her decisions have, in choosing war and guns rather than peace and a tree costume. The

game shows Elisabeth that her decisions not only pertain to herself but can also influence the lives of other people.

This conversation also teaches Elisabeth about the agency she has. While Elisabeth is able to choose what the story looks like, she learns that not everyone has a choice. If, as Daniel claims, “whoever makes up the story makes up the world” (119), Elisabeth has the power to decide who is represented in the story. This suggests that people who have the power to make decisions about who and what is represented, shape what the world looks like. An illustration in the novel is the way in which Pauline Boty was seen as a less valid pop artist compared to her male peers, and therefore erased from a cultural canon. Daniel then explains that not everyone has the agency to make a choice, so the “characters who seem to have no choice at all” (120) should be welcomed “into the home of your story” (119). This game demonstrates that people who are not represented in the mainstream have little choice in the world, but the people that have a voice should make sure people in less fortunate positions are represented.

At the end of the game, Elisabeth shows that she has learned to look at a story from different perspectives. Daniel tells the story of Goldilocks and the three bears, except in this version, Goldilocks is a vandal who ravages the home of the three bears with a spray paint can. At the beginning of the game Goldilocks is a “bad wicked rude vandal of a girl” (117), but near the end, Elisabeth tries to find the motivation for the character’s actions: “what if Goldilocks was doing what she was doing because she had no choice?” (121). Instead of writing her off as a vandal, Elisabeth looks at the story from a different perspective. She gives Goldilocks the benefit of the doubt, because Daniel tells her that “if you’re telling a story, always give your characters the same benefit of the doubt you’d welcome when it comes to yourself” (120). Here, *Autumn* advocates an open-mindedness and condemns prejudice towards others, while suggesting that this is achieved by having a dialogue.

In *Autumn*, reading is also a means to gain new perspectives. A recurring question of Daniel is “what you reading?” (258). Reading stands for escape, when Elisabeth reads *Brave New World* to pass the time at the post office, and *Metamorphoses* at Daniel’s bedside. Elisabeth’s mother tries to work her way through classic works from the western literary canon, such as “Middlemarch, Moby-Dick, War and Peace”, again emphasising the intertextual nature of the novel (215). Daniel advocates for the importance of reading books when he says, “Always be reading something” but shows that reading does not only mean reading books: “How else will we read the world?” (68). Reading, then, means being perceptive to what is happening in the world.

In the novel, Daniel’s sister “reads all the time, and she prefers to be reading several things at once, she says it gives endless perspective and dimension” (183). This suggests that reading stories encourages a kind of liberalism, as different stories provide different perspectives and represent different voices. Through her friendship with Daniel, Elisabeth has learned to look at the world from different perspectives and question people’s views and expose inconsistencies and false beliefs. Because of this, Elisabeth’s mother calls her a “very difficult child to read” (213). *Autumn* shows that a dialogue can result in more openness to different stories and perspectives, which would lead to more marginalised voices being heard.

### The End of Dialogue

*Autumn* also highlights the circumstances of people who do not have a voice. In the story of their game of Bagatelle, the man in the tree costume is defenceless against the man with the gun. In one of Daniel's surreal dreams, he mirrors this character, as he too is stuck in a tree. Daniel "seems to be shut inside something remarkably like the trunk of a Scots pine" (89). He has no choice: "He can't move [...] His mouth and eyes are resined shut" (89). He nevertheless is optimistic about his situation and "Daniel in the bed, inside the tree, isn't panicking" (90). Like Daniel in the tree, Daniel in the bed is also trapped, mirroring the disadvantaged character in his own story, someone without the ability and power to defend himself. Stuart Kelly also points out the allusion to *The Tempest*, in which Ariel is trapped in a tree by Sycorax, highlighting again the intertextuality in the book.

In the fictional present, Daniel's circumstances are similar to the man trapped in a tree. While he is in coma, he is immobile, mute, and his nurses mostly speak for him, reflecting the circumstances of marginalised groups who have no representative voice. Elisabeth's visits to Daniel are one-sided; she sits next to Daniel's bed, addresses him sometimes, but mostly reads. All conversations Elisabeth has with Daniel while he is asleep are imagined: "That moment of dialogue? Imagined" (33). Still, Elisabeth continues to visit him at the care home.

Elisabeth knows that the silencing of people results in a limited representation of perspectives: "Daniel lies there still in the bed, and the cave of his mouth, its unsaying of these things, is the threshold to the end of the world as she knows it" (36). In his sleep, Daniel knows this too when he "touches, still deep in the sleep, his top lip [...] It's as if he's feeling, in the least conspicuous way, to test or to make sure he still has a mouth" (168). Here, having a mouth represents having agency, and it shows that not having a voice leads to marginalisation and not being represented in the mainstream.

Daniel's silence also suggests the end of a time where a dialogue is being had, which is how the state of the UK after the referendum is characterised. Throughout *Autumn*, chapters illustrate this situation: "All across the country, the country was divided, a fence here, a wall there, a line drawn here, a line crossed there" (61). The time is characterised by its polarisation, but Smith shows that the real concern lies in the rhetoric used in the debate about Brexit. This is illustrated by a radio show, during which a right-wing spokesperson who addresses groups of minorities threatens that "we're coming after you" (197). Smith highlights the normalisation of these threats in the debate surrounding Brexit and shows that this "blatant threat just made on the air by one person to another" (198) should be the real concern that emerged from the division after the EU referendum. In this "time of people saying stuff to each other and none of it actually ever becoming dialogue", *Autumn* shows that a dialogue can lead to an openness to other perspectives, which the novel proposes as the answer to the polarisation of this time (112).

The prejudice that Elisabeth's mother shows towards Daniel illustrates the necessity of a dialogue. When Elisabeth has to interview her neighbour for a school assignment, her mother will not let her speak to him because he "probably can't speak very good English" and she tells Elisabeth that she "can't just go bothering old frail people" (45). Because of these assumptions, she tells Elisabeth to pretend she is asking him questions and write down the answers that she thinks he would give. Elisabeth's mother is prejudiced which leads Elisabeth to make assumptions about Daniel. Not giving Daniel a voice and letting him speak for himself shows the unwillingness to listen to another.

Elisabeth's mother thinks that Daniel is a foreigner, he is gay, and it is even implied that she thinks he is a paedophile. Yet, throughout the novel she does not bother to find out whether any of those assumptions are true. Elisabeth, on the other hand, develops a friendship with him and their friendship illustrates how an open-mindedness to others leads to less

assumptions about the other. Elisabeth's mother clings to her own assumptions about Daniel, and near the end of the novel, she continues to refer to Daniel as "a jolly old gay man" (213), showing the prejudice that results from a lack of dialogue.

This scene also illustrates what effect telling lies can have. When Elisabeth's mother shows Daniel what Elisabeth has written, Elisabeth is ashamed which leads her to lie more as she pretends to be her non-existent sister. Daniel also demonstrates what happens when people choose to tell a lie rather than the boring truth: "You and I will know I've lied, but your mother won't. You and I will know something that your mother doesn't. That will make us feel different towards not just your mother, but each other. A wedge will come between us all. You will stop trusting me" (114). Daniel demonstrates here that lying divides people because of the loss of trust and it shows the honesty that is needed for a dialogue.

## Conclusion

Intertextuality plays an important role in *Autumn*, and it provides a useful way of looking at an important theme in the novel. In existing debate on *Autumn*, critics and scholars have highlighted the importance of time and the political context in the novel, but intertextuality has not been discussed much, despite the prevalence of the notion in Smith's work. The theories discussed here demonstrate that no text ever exists in isolation and – dialogism in particular – make the reader aware of a plurality of perspectives. This notion is expressed in *Autumn* through intertextuality. The novel demonstrates the role of a cultural canon and shows that people in power decide which stories and voices are remembered. This demonstrates the need for representation and shows why it is important that marginalised people are given a voice as well. In the novel, Pauline Boty's story and vanished paintings alongside references to canonical works of literature illustrate how marginalised voices have been neglected through history, and the novel highlights the circumstances of these groups. *Autumn* shows that an openness is necessary for different voices to be heard, which, in turn, is achieved by having a dialogue. As the story takes place during the time of the Brexit vote in the UK, it shows that a dialogue can be an answer to the division and xenophobic rhetoric that is expressed at the time.

All things considered, it is unfortunate that the lack of extensive discussion on *Autumn* limits the different academic perspectives on the novel in this thesis. Additionally, in focussing on certain texts by big theorists of intertextuality like Bakhtin, Kristeva and Genette, I have limited myself to only a few of the major theories. A topic, then, about which there is much more to say is the role of a cultural canon and the consequences of a limited set of widely considered significant pieces of cultural heritage. Lastly, it might be interesting to further analyse the role of intertextuality in the whole of Smith's seasonal quartet, once *Summer*, the fourth instalment, is out.

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