

68. Between Myth and Reality: The Metamodern Oscillation of Sincerity and Irony in Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet¹

Sıla YÖNDEN BAĞRIYANIK²

APA: Yönden Bağrıyanık, S. (2024). Between Myth and Reality: The Metamodern Oscillation of Sincerity and Irony in Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (41), 1284-1293. DOI: <https://zenodo.org/record/13355250>

Abstract

This paper explores the dynamic interaction between sincerity and irony within Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet, utilizing the metamodern lens to examine how the novels engage with and critique cultural legacies through mythological motifs. Smith's narrative techniques, deeply informed by Julia Kristeva's theories of semiotics and intertextuality, adeptly incorporate mythic elements with contemporary societal issues, creating a rich textual framework that reflects the complexities of modern identity, transformation, and the human condition. The analysis focuses on how these narratives embody the metamodern oscillation between reverence and skepticism of myths, thus highlighting their relevance and adaptability in addressing modern challenges such as Brexit. Furthermore, the paper delves into Smith's use of Kristeva's notion of the "semiotic chora" and intertextuality to explore how personal and collective histories are narratively intertwined. Through a close reading of the novels, the study illustrates Smith's skill in merging the mythical with the real, and the ancient with the modern, to question the sufficiency of traditional narratives in contemporary society. This paper aims to contribute to understanding how Smith's Seasonal Quartet challenges and enriches the literary landscape by redefining the boundaries of narrative and myth in literature.

Keywords: Semiotic theory, Narrative strategies, Cultural and mythical resonances, Cultural Critique, Contemporary identity

¹ **Statement (Thesis / Paper):** This study is based on a section of the thesis "Transtextuality and Mythical Resonances in Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet", which is in the process of being prepared by Sıla Yönden Bağrıyanık under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kuğu TEKİN within the scope of Atılım University, Institute of Social Sciences, English Culture and Literature PhD Program." It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation process of this study and all the studies utilised are indicated in the bibliography.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest is declared.

Funding: No external funding was used to support this research.

Copyright & Licence: The authors own the copyright of their work published in the journal and their work is published under the CC BY-NC 4.0 licence.

Source: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are stated in the bibliography.

Similarity Report: Received - Turnitin, Rate: 3

Ethics Complaint: editor@rumelide.com

Article Type: Research article, **Article Registration Date:** 14.05.2024-**Acceptance Date:** 20.08.2024-

Publication Date: 21.08.2024; **DOI:** <https://zenodo.org/record/13355250>

Peer Review: Two External Referees / Double Blind

² Doktora Öğrencisi, Atılım Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi. İngiliz Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Doktora Programı / PhD Student, Atılım University, Faculty of Social Sciences. PhD Program in English Culture and Literature (Ankara, Türkiye), silayonden@me.com, **ORCID ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2413-4578> **ROR ID:** <https://ror.org/04pd3v454>, **ISNI:** 0000 0004 0595 4604 **Crossref Funder ID** 501100005183

Mit ile Gerçeklik Arasında: Ali Smith'in Mevsimsel Dörtlemesi'nde İçtenlik ve İroninin Metamodern Salınımı³

Öz

Bu makale, Ali Smith'in Mevsimsel Dörtlüsü'nde içtenlik ve ironi arasındaki dinamik etkileşimi inceleyerek, mitolojik motifler aracılığıyla kültürel mirasları nasıl sorguladığını ve bunlarla nasıl etkileşime girdiğini metamodern bir bakış açısıyla ele alır. Smith'in anlatı teknikleri, Julia Kristeva'nın semiyotik ve metinlerarasılık teorilerinden derinlemesine beslenmiş olup, çağdaş toplumsal sorunlarla mitolojik unsurları ustaca harmanlayarak, modern kimlik, dönüşüm ve insan durumunun karmaşıklıklarını yansıtan zengin bir metinsel çerçeve oluşturur. Analiz, bu anlatıların mitlere olan saygı ve şüpheciliği arasındaki metamodern dalgalanmayı vurgulayarak, Brexit gibi modern sorunlarla başa çıkmada bu mitlerin geçerliliğini ve uyum kabiliyetini ortaya koyar. Ayrıca, bu makale, Smith'in "semiyotik kora" ve metinlerarasılık kavramlarını kullanarak kişisel ve kolektif tarihlerin nasıl iç içe geçtiğini araştırır. Romanların detaylı incelenmesiyle, çalışma, Smith'in mitolojik olanı gerçekle ve antik olanı çağdaşla nasıl bütünleştirdiğini, böylece çağdaş toplumda geleneksel anlatıların yetersizliğini sorguladığını gösterir. Bu makale, Smith'in Mevsimsel Dörtlüsü'nün sadece edebi manzarayı zorlamakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda anlatı ve mitin sınırlarını yeniden tanımlayarak edebiyatı nasıl zenginleştirdiğine dair bir anlayış sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Metamodernizm, Semiyotik Teori, Anlatı Yenilikleri, Kültürel Eleştiri, Kimlik ve Dönüşüm

In Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet, sincerity and irony emerge vividly through her engagement with mythological motifs, reflecting the metamodern characteristic of oscillating between embracing and critiquing cultural legacies. The novels—*Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*—serve as a textured canvas where the timeless appeal of myths intersects with contemporary realities, illustrating Smith's capacity to fold deep cultural resonances into the fabric of modern life, in line with Julia Kristeva's semiotic approach. Kristeva, who delves deeply into the significance of intertextuality and myth in contemporary literature, notes, "[a]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 66). This insight into the textural complexity of literature provides a framework for understanding how Smith's novels weave together sincere mythic engagement with a critical, ironic lens.

The Quartet adeptly employs mythic references to delve into themes of transformation, identity, and the human condition. For example, in *Autumn*, Smith explores the transient nature of life, interweaving the

³ **Beyan (Tez/ Bildiri):** Bu çalışma Doç. Dr. Kuğu TEKİN danışmanlığında Sıla Yönden Bağrıyanık tarafından Atılım Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü İngiliz Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Doktora Programı kapsamında hazırlanma sürecinde olan "Transtextuality and Mythical Resonances in Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet" tezinin bir bölümünden hareketle yazılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

Çıkar Çatışması: Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

Finansman: Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.

Telif Hakkı & Lisans: Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmalarını CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.

Kaynak: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

Benzerlik Raporu: Alındı – Turnitin, Oran: %3

Etik Şikayeti: editor@rumelide.com

Makale Türü: Araştırma makalesi, **Makale Kayıt Tarihi:** 14.05.2024-**Kabul Tarihi:** 20.08.2024-**Yayın Tarihi:** 21.08.2024; **DOI:** <https://zenodo.org/record/13355250>

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körlme

mythic elements of renewal and decay. This engagement is not merely reverential; it also questions the relevance and adaptability of these myths within the framework of contemporary societal issues such as Brexit. The juxtaposition creates a rich dialogue between the sincerity of mythic resonance and the irony of the myths' seeming inability to encapsulate modern complexities fully. This dynamic is underscored by Smith's narrative strategy, which Kristeva would argue brings "a new type of textuality" and reflects "the text itself coming to life" (Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 59).

Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and her focus on the semiotic dimension of language provide a valuable lens through which to examine Smith's narrative techniques. These techniques evoke deep, often pre-linguistic resonances, engaging with the symbolic content of myths while simultaneously disrupting traditional narrative forms with modernist and postmodernist techniques. The oscillation between sincerity and irony in Smith's work reflects a metamodern sensibility, capturing the ongoing negotiation between historical reverence and contemporary critique. For instance, Kristeva explains that the semiotic chora is "the place where the subject is both generated and negated" (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25), a concept that can be seen in how Smith's narratives generate and simultaneously question mythic narratives within the fabric of modern societal issues.

In *Winter*, Smith's narrative strategy involves the retelling of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, a story about renewal and reconciliation. Here, Smith not only revisits the mythic underpinnings of the narrative but also ironically comments on the impossibility of such neat resolutions in today's fractured world. The sincere invocation of myth is used to highlight not just a hope for reconciliation but also to underscore the irony of unresolved contemporary conflicts, such as those exacerbated by political divisiveness. This is vividly captured in Smith's reflection on the nature of storytelling and reality, where she states, "[w]hoever makes up the story makes up the world" (*Winter*, 203). Here, the narrative delves into the mythic while also critiquing the simplicity of such stories in capturing the complexity of human experiences.

Ali Smith In *Winter* also harnesses the narrative and thematic essence of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* to provide a rich understanding of both mythic motifs and contemporary resonance. The choice of *Cymbeline*, a play that deals with themes of division and renewal, mirrors the discord and the longing for unity in modern society. Smith's recontextualization of this narrative in the backdrop of a modern, fractious Britain, particularly post-Brexit, serves as a profound commentary on the cyclical nature of human conflicts and the perennial hope for reconciliation.

Smith's adaptation of this Shakespearean text extends beyond mere retelling. It interrogates the feasibility of such mythic resolutions in a world that is markedly more cynical and fragmented than the one Shakespeare might have conceived. By positioning her narrative in the winter season, traditionally associated with dormancy and death but also the promise of eventual renewal, Smith encapsulates the dual nature of myth: as a source of timeless wisdom and as an oversimplified template unfit for the complexities of contemporary life. This duality is captured in her prose, which oscillates between poetic reflections on the natural world and stark dialogues that lay bare the tensions between her characters, symbolizing broader societal divisions.

The novel's setting during the winter season also metaphorically enhances this exploration. Winter, in both literal and figurative senses, represents a time of introspection and dormancy, which in the mythic cycle precedes renewal. However, Smith subverts this expectation by layering her winter landscape with scenes of stark realism interspersed with surreal, dream-like sequences that challenge the linear

progression typical of mythical narratives. This blending of realism with surrealism not only disrupts the narrative flow but also mimics the often-disjointed experience of contemporary life, where the boundaries between the real and the imagined, the factual and the mythical, are increasingly blurred.

The irony Smith employs is not just a narrative technique but a lens through which the efficacy of myth in contemporary discourse is scrutinized. While *Cymbeline* ends with restoration and forgiveness, *Winter* suggests that such neat endings are unrealistic in the real world. The characters in *Winter*—Sophia, Arthur, and Lux—are entangled in personal and political conflicts that reflect larger societal issues, such as xenophobia, environmental crisis, and the generational divide over Brexit. The mythic hope for reconciliation is thus contrasted sharply with the reality of persistent societal discord, as highlighted by Smith's poignant narrative voice, which often steps back to the question, "Is this a story of renewal and love, or is it a story of division and strife?" (*Winter*, 157).

In *Winter*, Ali Smith also artfully navigates the complex interplay between the mythical and the real, employing the structure and themes of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* to engage deeply with contemporary societal divides. This engagement is not merely a backdrop but serves as the central axis around which the narrative tension and thematic exploration of the novel revolve. Smith's choice of *Cymbeline* is particularly poignant, reflecting her intent to explore these motifs under the harsh light of modern societal issues, including the pervasive sense of disconnection felt in post-trial Britain.

Smith's narrative does not simply retell Shakespeare's story but reimagines it within a modern framework, questioning the plausibility of mythic resolutions in our contemporary, often cynical age. This skepticism is woven into the fabric of her characters' interactions. For instance, Sophia, an aging businesswoman, embodies a brittle facade of control that cracks as the narrative progresses, revealing deep-seated fears and vulnerabilities that resonate with the existential uncertainties of today's world. This character development underscores the narrative's inquiry into whether the mythic cycle of disintegration and renewal holds any real promise for individual transformation in the real world.

Furthermore, the use of irony as a narrative device becomes a tool for critical reflection. Smith's ironic tone allows her to probe the efficacy of mythic solutions to contemporary problems without entirely discarding the value of myth. This is evident in the way she handles the themes of family reconciliation and societal healing. The family at the center of *Winter* is fragmented, mirroring the broader societal fractures. The irony of their attempted reconciliation at Christmas—a time traditionally associated with unity and joy—highlights the often-oversimplified narrative of family togetherness prevalent in both myth and popular culture.

Additionally, Smith incorporates modern political and social issues into the narrative, such as environmental degradation and the refugee crisis, which serve as a contemporary analogy to the wars and exiles of *Cymbeline*. This incorporation not only modernizes the mythic elements but also grounds the narrative in the urgent realities of the present day, suggesting that while myths can offer a framework for understanding our world, they must be continually reinterpreted to remain relevant.

Lux, the young visitor who catalyses change among the characters, embodies this reinterpretation. Her perspective as an outsider allows her to see the hidden threads of connection and disconnection within the family and, by extension, within society. Her reflections on the nature of myth and storytelling offer a meta-commentary on the novel itself as she challenges the characters—and the readers—to consider whether stories reflect reality or shape it. Her presence underscores the potential for new insights and

transformations that arise when different narratives and perspectives intersect, highlighting the dynamic interplay between mythic archetypes and modern realities. And she, though an outsider both in terms of nationality and perspective, serves as a critical fulcrum. Her interactions with Sophia and Arthur bring to the fore the potential for empathy and understanding across divides, yet her presence also underscores the irony of seeking easy resolutions through mythical frameworks. Lux's insights into the characters' lives and her reflections on the nature of stories and reality—where she notes, “We tell stories to make sense of what makes no sense” (*Winter*, 211)—highlight the role of myth not just as a narrative device but as a tool for making sense of the world.

By weaving these elements together, Ali Smith enriches the narrative of *Winter* with a complex mosaic of themes that challenge and extend the mythic framework of *Cymbeline*. Her approach exemplifies the metamodern oscillation between sincerity and irony, acknowledging the depth and utility of myth while critically engaging with its application in the contemporary world. This exploration ensures that *Winter*, and by extension the Seasonal Quartet, not only engages with myth but also interrogates its role in contemporary narrative and societal discourse, reflecting the complex, often contradictory nature of modern life.

Moreover, Smith's engagement with the mythic does not stop at mere thematic exploration; it extends into the structure and style of her narrative. The fragmented, non-linear narrative style of *Winter* mimics the chaos and unpredictability of the contemporary world, challenging the linear, progressive narratives typical of myth. This structural choice not only reflects the complexity of modern issues but also serves as a critique of the mythic ideal of eternal recurrence and renewal, suggesting that real-world problems require solutions that go beyond cyclical narratives and simplistic moral lessons.

In Ali Smith's *Autumn*, the interplay of sincerity and irony offers a vivid portrayal of contemporary British society, particularly in the tumultuous period following Brexit. The narrative captures the essence of conflicting societal sentiments with a line that resonates throughout the turmoil: “All across the country, there was misery and rejoicing” (Smith, *Autumn* 59). This phrase encapsulates the dual nature of myth as both divisive and unifying, embodying the metamodern interplay between embracing and questioning cultural legacies.

In her novel, Smith imbues the narrative with a depth that moves beyond conventional literary interpretation. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's concept of the “semiotic chora” –described as “neither model nor copy, but a process of articulation, positing discontinuities, intervals, an infinity of traces without an original” (Kristeva 35), she accesses a foundational layer of meaning that exists before symbolic thought. This theoretical framework is reflected in how Smith portrays Elisabeth Demand, the protagonist, whose personal journey through the changing landscapes of identity in post-Brexit Britain mirrors broader societal transformations.

The recurring patterns of the seasons, juxtaposed against the linear progression of human lives, enhance the novel's exploration of memory and nostalgia, echoing Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. Daniel, an older man reflecting on his life's autumn, observes, “[t]ime travel is real... We do it all the time. Moment to moment, minute to minute” (Smith 115). This idea of fluid temporality challenges conventional linear narratives, suggesting a more layered and intertextual approach to understanding time and identity.

Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, which emphasizes the dialogic interaction between various texts

and the layering of meanings, is crucial in understanding the complex relationship between Elisabeth and Daniel in *Autumn*. Through Elisabeth's reflections and their shared experiences, Smith explores how personal memories and individual narratives are deeply entwined with broader cultural and historical discourses. This interweaving suggests that personal identities are not isolated constructs but are continually shaped by the cultural and historical narratives that surround them. Daniel's insight, "[w]hoever makes up the story makes up the world" (Smith 167), encapsulates this idea, highlighting the profound impact of narratives in constructing our realities. This line not only pins the power of storytelling but also reflects Kristeva's theory by illustrating how personal and cultural stories are interconnected, influencing how individuals perceive and interact with the world.

Smith extends this narrative exploration beyond mere character interaction to delve into broader cultural and historical contexts. Elisabeth's discussions with her mother, a former art lecturer, and her contemplations on Daniel's artwork, which often reflects historical events, allow Smith to weave personal anecdotes with mythic narratives of exile and migration. These elements highlight the novel's engagement with social and political issues, notably the impact of Brexit on community dynamics and the rising tide of nationalism and xenophobia.

The theme of belonging is interrogated through Elisabeth's struggle with her passport renewal—a bureaucratic ordeal that symbolizes her quest for identity amidst societal upheaval. This subplot not only shows the personal impact of national policies but also reflects the broader theme of displacement and cultural identity that permeates the narrative.

Smith's structural innovation, a non-linear, collage-like narrative style, also embodies the metamodernist oscillation between sincerity and irony. This approach allows her to address complex themes such as the fluidity of identity, the nature of memory, and the impact of historical narratives on contemporary life.

Moreover, Smith's integration of classical myths with modern-day political realities challenges the reader to reconsider the role of myths in contemporary society. By doing so, she prompts questions about whether myths are merely relics of the past or if they continue to shape our understanding of the world and our place within it.

In her depiction of the natural world and the changing seasons, Smith echoes classical mythology's emphasis on renewal and decay, serving as a metaphor for the cycles of history and personal growth. The seasonal motif in *Autumn* not only marks the passage of time but also symbolizes the potential for renewal amidst decay, reflecting the novel's overarching themes of transformation and rebirth.

Moreover, *Autumn* transcends traditional narrative boundaries to offer a profound commentary on the nature of time, identity, and belonging in a rapidly changing world. Through the interplay of text and subtext, Smith invites readers to navigate the complex interstices of personal and collective experience, challenging us to reflect on the power of stories to shape and reshape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

As *Autumn* delves deeply into the themes of time, identity, and belonging, it sets a foundational tone for the intricate explorations that follow in the subsequent novels of the Seasonal Quartet. Moving from the introspective and reflective tones of *Autumn*, Smith expands and builds upon these themes in *Spring* and *Summer*. The transition between the seasons in her narrative metaphorically mirrors the evolution

of the overarching themes—each book adding layers to the discussion of renewal, identity, and the cyclical nature of life. This progression prepares the reader for a deeper examination of how these themes interact with more global issues in the later books, illustrating the complex interplay between the personal and the universal, and between the mythic and the modern. In *Spring* and *Summer*, Smith not only continues to explore these motifs but also introduces a critical perspective on the challenges and contradictions inherent in the myths of renewal and rebirth, especially in the context of contemporary global crises.

Spring and *Summer* further elaborate on these themes, using myths related to renewal and rebirth to both sincerely celebrate the cyclical nature of life and to ironically critique the oversimplification of such cycles in the face of complex global crises like climate change and refugee movements. The use of myth here acts as a double-edged sword, simultaneously pointing to universal truths and exposing the gaps in our contemporary global narrative. This dual engagement is particularly present in *Spring*, where Smith intertwines the personal and political in a narrative that both acknowledges and questions the power of renewal and rebirth as central mythic themes.

In *Spring* and *Summer*, Ali Smith's engagement with myths related to renewal and rebirth operates within a framework that critiques their traditional interpretations, applying a metamodern oscillation between embracing and questioning these enduring narratives. Through her treatment of these themes, Smith illustrates the limitations of classical mythic solutions in addressing complex contemporary issues such as climate change, migration, and social division.

In *Spring*, Smith delves into the concept of personal and societal renewal through her portrayal of the character Richard, whose existential crisis mirrors the broader societal struggles against stagnation and despair. Richard's journey is emblematic of the search for meaning in a fragmented world, where the promise of renewal is clouded by the overwhelming nature of global issues. This personal narrative of renewal questions the efficacy of mythic themes in a world that seems perpetually on the brink of moral and ecological collapse. Kristeva's notion of intertextuality becomes crucial here as Smith interweaves various cultural, historical and literary references to create a rich dialogue between the past and the present, suggesting that the rejuvenation of society requires a re-evaluation of historical narratives and their relevance to current realities.

The dynamic between Richard and Florence in *Spring* also embodies Kristeva's concepts of intertextuality and semiotic exploration. Florence, portrayed as a perceptive young character who challenges prevailing norms, acts as a semiotic extension to Richard's disillusioned narrative, presenting alternative viewpoints and avenues for action. Their interactions underscore the potential for rejuvenation through emerging generational perspectives, juxtaposing youthful optimism with mature skepticism in a discourse that examines the feasibility and authenticity of societal transformation.

Their relationship in *Spring* serves as a microcosm of the broader societal dialogue between tradition and innovation, reflecting Kristeva's notion of symbolic dimensions of language. Florence, embodying a fresh perspective unencumbered by historical constraints, symbolizes the semiotic potential for renewal and transformation. In contrast, Richard represents the symbolic order, entrenched in established narratives and skeptical of change. Their interplay highlights the tension between the fluidity of semiotic exploration and the stability of symbolic representation, ultimately suggesting the potential for societal renewal lies in the dynamic interaction between these two modes of meaning-making.

Florence's role as a catalyst for Richard's introspection mirrors Kristeva's concept of the subject being both generated and negated within the semiotic chora. Through their dialogue, Richard confronts the limitations of his symbolic framework, leading to a re-evaluation of his beliefs and assumptions. This process of self-interrogation aligns with Kristeva's idea of the semiotic disrupting and subverting established symbolic structures, opening up new possibilities for meaning and action. In this way, the dynamic between Richard and Florence encapsulates Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, where texts (or in this case, individuals) intersect and influence each other, generating new layers of meaning and understanding. Florence's perspective acts as a counterpoint to Richard's cynicism, challenging him to reconsider his worldview and inspiring him to embrace the transformative potential of semiotic exploration. Through their evolving relationship, Smith explores the complex interplay between tradition and innovation, sincerity and irony, offering insights into the possibilities and challenges of societal change in the metamodern age. This dynamic interaction not only enriches the narrative but also underscores the broader thematic exploration of the Seasonal Quartet, where characters serve as vehicles for probing the intricacies of human experience and societal evolution.

Building on the exploration of dynamic character interactions, the interplay of text and image in *Spring* further enriches the narrative structure, echoing Kristeva's exploration of the semiotic and symbolic dimensions of text. Here, visual art and narrative converge to delve into themes of visibility and invisibility within the context of refugee crises. This blending of visual and textual elements not only enhances the storytelling but also deepens the thematic exploration, inviting readers to consider the complexities of human experience in the face of displacement and marginalization. Smith uses visual motifs not only to enhance the narrative but also to invoke the semiotic realm, tapping into the pre-verbal elements of human experience that underscore the emotional and ethical implications of political and social issues.

Summer, continuing the exploration of cyclical renewal, confronts the ironies of attempting to apply ancient mythic structures to modern crises. The novel's setting during a global pandemic highlights the stark contrast between the mythic ideal of renewal—often portrayed as a clean, linear process—and the messy, unpredictable reality of contemporary global challenges. The narrative questions whether the mythic cycle of renewal can offer genuine solutions or merely serves as a comforting illusion in the face of ongoing turmoil.

The character of Sacha in *Summer* embodies this critical engagement with myths. Her environmental activism is portrayed with both a deep sincerity and a poignant awareness of its potential futility. This dual perspective reflects the metamodern stance of engaging with traditional narratives while critically assessing their application in the modern world. Sacha's activism, infused with both hope and despair, challenges the reader to consider the role of individual action in the face of systemic issues—a key theme in Smith's quartet that resonates with Frye's critique of the archetype of the hero as an oversimplified solution to complex problems.

Smith's portrayal of the British family in *Summer*, dealing with the realities of lockdown, serves as a microcosm for exploring broader societal issues. The enforced isolation and introspection of the characters bring to the surface underlying tensions and unresolved conflicts, providing a fertile ground for examining the myths of family unity and societal coherence. This narrative setting allows Smith to explore the potential for personal and collective renewal amidst adversity, using the family as a symbol of the broader societal need for transformation.

Through these narratives, Smith not only engages with but also reconfigures the traditional myths of renewal and rebirth, placing them within a metamodern framework that embraces complexity and contradiction. Her novels challenge the reader to reconsider the role of these myths in contemporary society, suggesting that true renewal may require a radical rethinking of our relationships with each other and with the natural world. This approach not only enriches the narrative but also invites a deeper engagement with the pressing issues of contemporary times, highlighting the transformative power of literature in shaping and reflecting cultural and societal debates.

In crafting her narrative style, Smith skilfully navigates between the realms of myth and reality, drawing on Kristeva's concept of the "semiotic chora" to infuse her prose with depth and resonance. This theoretical lens allows for an understanding of how Smith's language, both rich and poetic, moves fluidly between clear storytelling and abstract lyricism. Particularly in *Summer*, the rhythmic and poetic qualities of her prose create an immersive experience for readers, drawing them into the narratives while also encouraging a critical perspective. This balance between emotional engagement and intellectual scrutiny ensures that the themes resonate deeply, offering readers a profound literary journey through the complexities of the human experience.

Furthermore, Smith's intertextual play with myths serves as a meta-commentary on the act of storytelling itself. By continuously referencing and revisiting ancient myths, she not only enriches the narrative texture of her novels but also critically engages with the process of narrative creation, questioning who gets to tell stories and whose stories get told. This reflects a metamodern return to narrative sincerity, acknowledging the power of stories to shape our understanding of the world while also maintaining an ironic awareness of the limitations and narrative forms. This is particularly highlighted in *Summer*, where Smith notes, "History and stories are not the same thing" (*Summer*, 124), pointing to the tension between narrative construction and historical reality.

The employment of both mythic reverence and ironic detachment allows Smith to navigate the tensions between tradition and innovation, ancient and modern, nostalgia and progress. This is particularly evident in the way her characters often find themselves caught between a yearning for mythic simplicity and the reality of contemporary complexity, a situation that is emblematic of the metamodern condition. Smith's exploration of these tensions is not just a narrative device but a profound commentary on the role of mythology in contemporary culture, inviting readers to reflect on the relevance and transformation of mythic themes in modern times.

Additionally, the Quartet's use of the seasons as a metaphorical framework encourages a profound exploration of time, change, and continuity—key themes in both mythological and modern narratives. Smith's cyclical conception of time, reflected in the structure of the Quartet, offers a sincere homage to the natural cycles depicted in myths while also employing irony to comment on the human inability to learn from the past, as contemporary issues persist through the cycles of seasons and history.

Through the application of Kristeva's semiotic theory, this analysis aimed to illustrate how Smith's text functions as a vibrant arena for cultural and narrative exploration. Within these pages, ancient myths experience not only a renaissance but also a rigorous interrogation, illuminating and wrestling with the nuances of contemporary complexities. Through the lens of Kristeva's semiotic theory, this analysis aspired to reveal how Smith's text serves as a dynamic platform for probing cultural and narrative depths. Here, ancient myths are not merely resurrected but are also subjected to a discerning examination, elucidating and grappling with the intricacies of modern complexities.

References

- Frye, N. (1951). The archetypes of literature. *The Kenyon Review*, 1(2), 171-189
- Genette, G. (1997). *Palimpsests: Literature in the second degree* (C. Newman & C. Doubinsky, Trans.). University of Nebraska Press
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach To Literature and Art* (L. S. Roudiez, Ed.; T. Gora, A. Jardine, & L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1984). *Revolution in Poetic Language* (M. Waller, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
- Smith, A. (2017). *Autumn*. Anchor Books.
- Smith, A. (2018). *Winter*. Anchor Books.
- Smith, A. (2019). *Spring*. Anchor Books.
- Smith, A. (2020). *Summer*. Anchor Books.