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Figures and Grounds: Art and the Body Politic in Ali Smith's *Winter*

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ABSTRACT

The essay reads *Winter* (2017), the second volume of Ali Smith's "Seasonal Quartet," as a novel that engages with Brexit by revitalizing the metaphor of the body politic. Focusing on the role of landscape, the novel's use of art objects and its intertextual conversation with Shakespeare's late romance *Cymbeline* (ca. 1610), the essay also addresses the ways in which the reimagining of the body politic is entangled with Smith's poetic strategies, arguing that matters of form and aesthetics are indistinguishable from the novel's ethical and political concerns. Exploring parallels with post-'45 British landscape painting and art, especially Barbara Hepworth's works, the analysis is concerned with two striking intrusions of the irrational in the novel: a hallucinated lump of landscape hovering above the characters and a child's head floating in the air; both are crucial to the revitalization of the metaphor of the body politic as well as in the conversation the novel conducts with British art and with *Cymbeline*, a play that is an exploration of the idea of the body politic and of sovereignty in the context of the end of Britain's relations with Europe. (TB)

KEYWORDS: Brexit, body politic, landscape, British art, *Cymbeline*

In *Winter* (2017),[1] the second volume of Ali Smith's "Seasonal Quartet" (2016–20), Charlotte has a recurring nightmare in which she is cutting herself open with a pair of chicken scissors: "In my dreams—she says—I'm a quartered kingdom" (56). This is one of several images that evoke the trope of the body politic, reinforcing Catherine Bernard's claim according to which Brexit has resuscitated this metaphor in British literature, with all its concomitant tropes like purity and immunity (see Bernard). This essay will explore the implications of this resuscitation in *Winter*,[2] focusing on the role of landscape, the novel's use of art objects and its intertextual conversation with Shakespeare's late romance *Cymbeline* (ca. 1610), also addressing the ways in which the reimagining of the body politic is entangled with Smith's poetic strategies. Much of my reading will be concerned with two striking instances of the irrational in the novel: a child's head floating in the air and an apparition

during Christmas dinner. I shall argue that these hallucinated objects are crucial to the way the novel revitalizes the metaphor of the body politic.

Winter is a Christmas story featuring two alienated sisters, both in their seventies, who have not met for years. The younger, Sophia Cleves is a retired businesswoman living in a large house in Cornwall, the setting for the Christmas reunion orchestrated by one of Ali Smith's mysterious heroines, the young Croatian girl Lux.[3] Lux is picked up at a bus stop by Art, Sophia's son, who was to take his girlfriend Charlotte with himself to Cornwall, finally introducing her to his mother after three years. Falling out with Charlotte just before Christmas, he hires homeless Lux to impersonate Charlotte for the sake of his mother. Upon entering the house, they find Sophia acting oddly and shivering with cold, although she is wrapped in warm clothes, and the house is overheated. It is Lux's idea to call Sophia's estranged older sister, Iris, who arrives within a few hours, bringing loads of foodstuff. Chronicling the three days of Christmas, the narrative—as is usual in Smith—is full of flashbacks and flashforwards, as well as of descriptions of works of art: paintings and other graphic art, photographs, films, and books. From the flashbacks, it is possible to reconstruct a partial history of post-1945 Britain, a history in which the cold war looms large: Iris was one of the women who set up the camp of anti-nuclear protesters in 1981 outside the Greenham Common airbase. 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. It is obvious that Sophia voted leave, while Iris, who has recently returned from Greece where she was working with refugees, is an ardent remainer. This contrast plays a key role in the way *Winter* conceives of the metaphor of the body politic.

A slab of landscape

Right in the middle of a far from cozy Christmas Day dinner, Art Cleves notices a chunk of Cornwall coastline floating above the dining table.

> The room darkens. The room fills, or Art's nose does, with a smell of plantlife, the smell of greenness you get when you snap the stem of something living. . . .
>
> He looks up.
>
> A foot and a half above all their heads, floating, precarious, suspended by nothing, a piece of rock or a slab of landscape roughly the size of a small car or a grand piano is hanging there in the air. . . .
>
> The underside of it is the colour that happens when black meets green. (215–16)

While this apparition is not a landscape in any traditional sense, the phrase "slab of landscape" is used advisedly, in line with the quartet's treatment of space. The fact that it is not seen by anyone else in the room suggests that the hallucination is tailor-made for Art, who is writing what he calls a nature blog called "Art in Nature." Later in the novel, we are shown a sample entry, a self-indulgent piece on puddles in the most hackneyed and watered-down Wordsworthian tradition (183–86), and Art admits to Lux that he had not even taken the trouble to visit any puddles before writing about them. The apparition, then, is most obviously seen as an intrusion of the Real, fate's revenge for the spuriousness of Art's "love of nature." This is reinforced by the fact that the phenomenon is immediately preceded by the only landscape description in *Winter*, a wishful fantasy Art indulges in during the dinner.

> He wants real winter where woods are sheathed in snow, trees emphatic with its white, their bareness shining and enhanced because of it, the ground underfoot snow-covered as if with frozen feathers or shredded cloud but streaked with gold through the trees from low winter sun, and at the end of the barely discernible track, along the dip in the snow that indicates a muffled path between the trees, the view and the woods opening to a light that's itself untrodden, never been blemished, wide like an expanse of snow-sea, above it more snow promised, waiting its time in the blank of the sky. (214–15)

This passage—like Art's puddle piece—is not a mental representation of anything in the novel, not least because snow remains a conspicuous absence in this Christmas narrative. This highly polished, very literary—or painterly—passage, something that would not be out of place in Art's blog, could in fact be an ekphrasis of the Hockney painting on the novel's cover. Landscape descriptions are rare and far between in the "Seasonal Quartet" anyway: although deeply concerned—to borrow W. J. T. Mitchell's words—not just with "what landscape 'is' or 'means' but [also with] what it does, how it works as a cultural practice" (1), Smith seems to be wary of such set pieces. Yet, landscape is an important term in her exploration of the mapping of mental spaces upon actual spaces, due to her awareness of the role the heavily ideological notion of the English landscape has played in the figuration of the body politic. As Stephen Daniels puts it, "the very idea of [English] landscape, its aesthetic integration of people and environment, offered an antidote to the fragmentation and alienation so often seen as uniquely modernist" (16). In the same vein, Simon Pugh notes that, recently, landscape has stood as "a

surrogate for more politicized notions of nationhood," a displaced expression of sentiments of attachment which are denied expression elsewhere (1).

Smith's interest in landscape, however, has other, aesthetic aspects, too, due to what one might call the paradoxical rhetoric of landscape. Usually providing the solid background against which English identity is figured, landscape itself has frequently served to figure this identity. An obvious example is the paean to the English landscape formulated by Mr. Stephens, the butler narrator of Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989):

> The English landscape at its finest possesses a quality that the landscapes of other nations, however more superficially dramatic, inevitably fail to possess. It is, I believe, a quality that will mark out the English landscape to any objective observer as the most deeply satisfying in the world, and this quality is probably best summed up by the term "greatness" . . . it is the very lack of obvious drama or spectacle that sets the beauty of our land apart. What is pertinent is the calmness of that beauty, its sense of restraint. It is as if the land knows of its own beauty, of its own greatness, and feels no need to shout it. (28)

What this passage, which is of particular interest for Smith, exemplifies is what David Matless calls "the relational hybridity of the term" (12), which makes landscape a perfect example of Bruno Latour's "quasi-object," "impossible to place on either side of a dualism of nature and culture, shuttling between fields of reference" (12). "Quasi-objects are entities that we perceive . . . as objects, as given things," but they exist in ways that cannot be grasped in terms of the basic dichotomies of modern Western thought (subject/object, mind/matter, and so forth): "what they are depends on what has happened to them, on the various translations that they have become involved in" (de Vries 134). Accordingly, landscape is "already both natural and cultural, deep and superficial" (Matless 12). It "naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site" (2). Landscape, then, is crucial to Smith's aesthetics and politics not only because of its ideological burden, but also because it is both figure and ground, a perfect fit for Smith's textual strategies.

Smith's aesthetics of landscape, encapsulated by the floating chunk, is in tune with the rethinking of landscape in British painting as well as in theory—a rethinking that was a reaction to the manifold crisis of traditional landscape. As the rendering of landscapes suffused with symbolic meaning

was becoming fraught with difficulties, painters were faced with "the growing inability to transfigure the world convincingly even in imaginative illusion" (Fuller 26). With the hollowing out of symbolic meanings and the loss of any clear criteria for choosing one bit of earth rather than another, the representation of landscape "collapsed into topography, on the one hand, and abstraction, on the other" (Fuller 26–27)—a process that is not unlike a belated dissociation of sensibility in the field of landscape. A commanding view of landscape (with all that this implies) had become increasingly difficult to maintain and conceptualize, for epistemological, political, and ecological reasons: instead of occupying a superior position that would enable the viewer to grasp the whole, we are related to the landscape through a variety of sensory ways, affects and intensities.[4] The "slab of landscape" hovering over the dinner table can be seen in terms of the representational crisis of landscape. In defiance of the painterly mode, the apparition resists integration into the dominant English tradition of pastoral landscape evoked in Art's musings. First of all, it is looming above Art rather than below him, unamenable to being surveyed. Secondly, it does not give itself to vision: anything but painterly, it is a three-dimensional, complex sensory assault on Art, anticipated by its powerful earthy smell, and rendered as predominantly tactile; even the colors are described as events rather than simple objects for observation: "the colour that happens when black meets green." Alive, vegetal, and defiantly formless, this anti-landscape refuses to lend itself to totalizing representation, to being broken down into meaningful details or to being seen in terms of structure.

The hallucination is reminiscent of some of the experimental, semi-abstract, or surrealist 1950s landscapes of Graham Sutherland (especially his *Sea Wall* series), Peter Lanyon (*St. Just*, 1953), and Alan Reynolds, with their unsettling, macabre, and violent anthropomorphic or metamorphic qualities and abstract tendencies. The analogies between Smith's text and these painters—two of them working in Cornwall—are relevant not only because of the similarities between their representational strategies, but also because, as Fiona Gaskin argues, their departure from the Neo-Romantic school of English landscape painting was informed by Cold War fears (Gaskin 127; Jolivette 31–32) not unrelated to their inability not to see landscape as something unstable and contentious rather than a timeless, stable ground reflecting and grounding the peaceful development of English culture (see Jolivette 10).[5]

Although her link with the rethinking of landscape is not immediately obvious, the ideas of the most pervasive artistic presence in *Winter*, that of

Barbara Hepworth, are deeply relevant to this aspect of the novel, as is made clear in the Hepworth quote featuring as one of the epigraphs: "Landscape directs its own images" (n. p.). Hepworth herself viewed her abstract sculptures as inspired by and related to the Cornwall landscape. "Above all—she explained—there was this sensation of moving physically over the contours of fullnesses and concavities, through hollows and over peaks—feeling, touching, seeing, through mind, hand, and eye. This sensation has never left me. I, the sculptor, am the landscape. I am the form and I am the hollow, the trust and the contour" (qtd. in Jolivette 53). Hepworth's approach to space and to her own sculpture was decidedly phenomenological, as is obvious from another remark of hers: "For a few years I became the object. I was the figure in the landscape and every sculpture contained to a greater or lesser degree the ever-changing forms and contours embodying my own response to a given position in that landscape" (qtd. in Jolivette 53–54).[6]

It is, however, not the relationship between the artist, the sculpture, and the landscape that is stressed in Smith's treatment of Hepworth's art. *Winter* introduces a generic fictional sculpture by Hepworth, simply consisting of two round stones (one featuring one of the sculptor's trademark holes), two "strikingly beautiful stones . . . meant to fit together" (251). Daniel, the owner of the sculpture, the object of Sophia's *amour fou* and Art's father, describes it as "a sort of a mother and child pairing, the child stone the little one and the larger stone the mother. The larger stone has the hole in it and a flat place on it where the smaller one is meant to sit" (272). Geometrical abstraction, however, was not what Hepworth was after. As Daniel explains—and Sophia intuits—Hepworth wanted the viewers "to want to touch what she makes . . ., to be reminded about things that are quite physical, sensory, immediate" (272).[7] The effect, which challenges the dualities of subject and object, inside and outside, is described by Alex Potts as the ability of these objects to draw the viewer into their spaces, becoming momentarily "more like architecture than sculpture" (158), echoing Merleau-Ponty, who categorically denied the standard distinction between optical appearances and tactile form (Potts 244). The role of the sculpture—or, more particularly, of the smaller stone—extends beyond the aesthetic in a way that is typical of Smith's strategy. While with its abstract perfection it embodies an ideal of consummate aesthetic achievement (as Daniel says, Hepworth "wanted a universal language" [273]), the sculpture also resonates with many personal losses and relations in the story: Sophia's uneasy relationship with her son and with motherhood, as well as her decisions not to spend the rest of her life with the love of her life, and not to tell either

Daniel or Art about their kinship. While the stone is hovering between the abstract–aesthetic, the allegorical and the phenomenological, the other Hepworth work that is present in *Winter* is even more typical of Smith's general strategy, in which the abstract is always on the verge of spilling over into the representational dimension. The work itself, a screenprint entitled *Winter Solstice* (1971),[8] is reproduced on the inside of the back cover and remains a paratextual presence, as there are no direct references to it in the text. It is a haunting image of what seems to be a blue sun hovering in a space framed by angular lines, and, like the sun in it, it is itself hovering between the representational and the abstract. The image is based on the contrast between the dissolving angularity of the framing lines and the perfect circularity of the shape in the middle, and on a color chiasmus in which the sun and the frame have swapped intensities: the blue sun radiates coldness, while the frames are not only predominantly yellow, but also distended, as if with the borrowed or displaced energy of the sun, which is stretching the frame-like structure to a bursting point. While the print is not mentioned in the text, the image itself is evoked in several ways. In a rare moment of sisterly harmony, Iris recalls one of Sophia's school projects, a model "House of the Future," on which they were working together. "I drew the sun through the summer house window" (204), she says, evoking the Hepworth print of what could be a fractured, multiplied window frame around the sun. There is, however, another Winter Solstice moment in the novel, the one in which Sophia sees the floating child's head—the metamorphosed smaller stone from the sculpture—playfully frolicking in the open window: "the head, merry in the threshold of the open window, had played a game of inside/outside with itself to the steady toll of the bell . . . closed its eyes in pleasure at the place where the outside air met the warm in the room, swinging like a pendulum, bracing itself against the wind direction when the wind blew" (106–07). This scene, with its intensities and movement, is even closer to the atmosphere of the Hepworth print, but the important point here is that the novel produces two moments that could be seen as ekphrases of Hepworth's abstract image: the plot, as it were, passes through the image, the abstract pattern becoming representational, while, in turn, an abstract beauty is allowed to shine through these contingent patterns. These scenes are crucial in terms of Smith's poetics: in both cases, the diegetic layer of the text, as it were, passes through an abstract image which becomes the representation of a specific phenomenon. On the level of technique, this resonates with the imaging of the body politic through the image of a landscape that is figure and ground at the same time.

Before moving on to this aspect of Smith's envisioning of the body politic, there is one more landscape-related feature shared by Hepworth's sculptures and *Winter*—and of the entire quartet—that needs to be addressed. One of Hepworth's trademark strategies is the application of sets of—parallel or radial—strings in her sculptures. From a phenomenological perspective, these strings "simultaneously encourage and prevent entrance in that the viewer remains aware of the sculpture as a precious and uninhabitable object" (Rachel Smith). If Hepworth's sculptures can be seen as imagings of landscape and of the body politic, the motif in Smith's quartet that corresponds to them is that of the wire fence. In the context of *Winter*, this evokes Greenham Common, which, before being appropriated for military purposes, had indeed been a common (146). The Women's Peace Camp outside the base, a formative experience in Iris's life, was established outside the wire fence, with many protesters chaining themselves to it or appropriating it for their own subversive purposes.[9] They "will be threading coloured wool and ribbon through the fencewire and across between the gates in intricate webbing, they'll be cutting holes in the perimeter fence with wirecutters and breaking into the base almost every night" (278). While breaking into the base and cutting holes into the fence are obvious acts of transgression, the colored wool and ribbons threaded into the wire amount to a political and aesthetic reappropriation of the wire, transforming it into a means of connectivity and questioning the very dichotomy of inside and outside, not unlike Hepworth's ambiguous strings.

The landscape painting which best conveys Smith's envisioning of the body politic is perhaps Eric Ravilious's prescient 1935 watercolor *Chalk Paths*, which represents one portion of the chalk chills of the South Downs with a barbed wire fence—exactly like the one around the Greenham Common air base—slicing through it. While in a compositional sense the fence seems to harmonize with the undulations of the land, it is sinister and incongruous, especially in 1935. The monochrome coloring and the toneless sky intensify the unreality of the landscape, making it look like a rural counterpart to the metaphysical townscapes of Giorgio de Chirico. Although there are no human figures, the land bears upon itself the marks of human habitation in the form of the paths made by extended use, following no recognizable geometrical pattern or design. According to Christopher Neve, Ravilious might have been looking for a "design in the landscape" (33). Having neither beginning nor end, the wire fence looks endless. Following the central path (which we presume to be older than the fence), it duplicates, but also, as it were, constrains it: the path, emerging spontaneously after decades or

centuries of land use, is now running alongside the fence. With the landscape identical on either side of the fence, there is no apparent reason for the existence of this object—it is far from obvious what it is supposed to protect or to keep out. Ravilious's fence evokes the perimeter of the Greenham Common airbase as well as the pointless electric fence erected in *Autumn*, the opening volume of Smith's quartet, apparently separating the land from itself, and, more generally, the characterization of post-referendum Britain as a land traversed and cut across by all manner of divisions and fences. The significance of fences, however, extends further. Smith's "Seasonal Quartet" is a condition of England novel that, besides chronicling contemporary events after the Brexit referendum, expands its geographical and historical scope. What is particularly noteworthy about the temporal dimensions is that Smith, adopting a thoroughly European perspective, identifies the key moment that has determined European and global history and the politics of space in World War II rather than in the Great War. (For Sophia, who grew up internalizing her father's likes and dislikes, World War II is "the War" [113]). In Smith's sequence, the political geography of the world that is taking shape is defined by camps and their perimeters, which, according to Giorgio Agamben (166–80), constitute the par excellence biopolitical space that had come to dominate twentieth-century history.

The references to visual art suggest that matters of form and aesthetics are indistinguishable from the novel's ethical and political concerns, and these entanglements are in turn inseparable from Smith's exploration of the body politic metaphor. The trademark hole in Hepworth's sculpture is another case in point—especially if placed in the context of the multitude of other holes in *Winter*. As Sophia recognizes—keeping the remark to herself, afraid that Daniel would find it pretentious, yet practically quoting a comment of Hepworth's—the effect of the hole in the larger stone is that it makes the viewer feel as if she were "seeing inside and outside something at once" (273). Like the child's head romping in the window frame, the holes in/on the sculpture make the inside/outside dichotomy problematic, evoking Merleau-Ponty's remark: "to look at an object is to inhabit it" (79). The subversive function of holes, however, is not restricted to the sphere of aesthetics. Contemplating the sculpture, Sophia remarks that "it would be good to be full of holes" (273), which immediately evokes Lux, the mysterious stranger with all her body piercings which she obediently removes in order not to scandalize Art's hidebound mother. The tiny holes suggest a porous body not unlike Hepworth's sculptures. Before her departure, Art is watching the girl reinserting the piercings: "[Lux] probed

with the silver the inner tunnels of each hole in her skin" (304). Lux, who is not sure she can legally stay on in the UK because of Brexit, is the nomad, the free-floating agent who, by her sheer presence, violates the logic of what Deleuze and Guattari call the territorialized, striated or gridded, homogeneous space of the State apparatus (223, 362, 370–73), that is, the fenced-off and fence-infested space of Brexit Britain. She embodies the strategy of the Greenham Common protesters who are cutting holes into the fence, in the spirit of what Mark Neocleous says about the body politic: "Because the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system, its boundaries tend to represent spaces which are threatened or precarious. Bodily orifices thereby come to represent points of entry or exit to social units. The general interest in the body's apertures is replicated in the preoccupation with social exits and entrances, which easily come to be seen as escape routes and invasions ("The Fate" 35).

For all the radical implications of this image, it would be an exaggeration to make claims for Ali Smith as a Deleuzian writer. While she might be said to go along with Deleuze and Guattari to the extent of following their dictum of "freeing the line" (173), she is sufficiently Modernist to celebrate the possibilities inherent in aesthetic form, or rather, forming, formation.[10] If we want a relevant visual analogy for Ali Smith's poetics, we could do worse than recall the work of Paul Klee (a key inspiration for Deleuze and Guattari as well as for Alan Reynolds) with its playful motivic repetitions, patterns, rhythms, and chromatic gradations. Form, pattern, and order in Smith are fragile and evanescent, always liable to dissolve and morph into something else—like those precarious moments of harmony between the four characters during the Christmas holiday. Aesthetic form, however, is not offered as a transcendence of the world's chaos. This is evident from the treatment of vegetal motifs in *Winter*, especially from the many instances of plants or parts of plants becoming ornamental patterns. Examples include the Corinthian capital on Sophia's bank card with a flourish of stony leaves (32); the "feathery fernleaf shapes ice makes on some surfaces" (53) that Art is making notes about; the metal curlicues in the design of the station windows that have Lux transfixed (69); the fleur-de-lis backdrops to the frescoes on which the human figures had been defaced, recalled by Sophia (110); and the trick picture on the cover of a *Radio Times*, in which a Christmas tree, on closer look, turns out to be a village (124). These patterns are all different (some of them are not even intentional), yet they are all alike in that they are momentary crystallizations, patternings in the constant, contingent, and directionless morphing of Smith's world, without any transcendental

meaning outside the specific situation and the fascination of the respective viewers.[11]

On the other hand, and in line with Smith's rethinking of the body politic, vegetal motifs often have a contrasting, more deterritorializing function. Besides the slab of landscape with its vegetal smell and inchoate greenness and the "lacy green growth" (29) sprouting on the floating child's head, the most prominent such motif is the recurrent one of moss. It appears in the winter fairy tale told to Art both by Sophia and Iris, in which green is defined as a winter color: "The earth is made of it. Green. Moss, algae, lichen, mould: formless, subjectless, abject life. It's the colour everything was before there were flowers, the colour of the first trees, the trees that didn't have leaves, had needles instead, the trees that grew in the first hiatus between cold and warm" (101–02). At one point, Iris claims that, rather than involving herself any longer in active political protest, now she would be "happy to be nothing but the moss that takes hold on the surfaces" of "No access" signs and on CCTV cameras "and greens itself over their words" (298).[12] Several of the disparate functions of the vegetal motif are condensed in the "print of a flower that runs across two late pages in *Cymbeline*" (315) in the folio of Shakespeare Lux has seen in Toronto.[13] While it is the ethereal beauty of the form that captivates her and, much later, Art, "the ghost of a flower not yet open on its stem" (319) is also associated with the more archetypal function of vegetation: the *folio* edition itself consists of metaphorical leaves that—like this very metaphor—are revitalized, encapsulating one of the themes of this winter tale: the story is full of metaphors of hibernation, freezing (petrification), and thawing (melting).

The floating head

The body politic, at least according to its traditional conceptions, is also a form, and, once it is caught up in Smith's aesthetic strategies, it becomes like other forms: fleeting, fragile, often paradoxical. One reason for this is that, if the novel (and the entire "Seasonal Quartet") is an attempt to envision the idea or image of a livable and viable body politic, it embarks on this enterprise from a perspective that is partly external. The formlessness of the hallucinated slab of landscape is partly the result of the fact that it is an untotalizable, synecdochic vision—a part that does not stand for the whole. Towards the end of the novel, in a flashforward to summer, Art, over somebody's shoulder, is reading an article in the metro about British people crowdfunding for a boat that would intercept a refugee boat in the Mediterranean. As he is confronted with this piece of news, for a moment,

"the coastline swings into the tube train carriage" (313). The recurrence of the apparition in this moment suggests that its fragmentary and untotalizable nature can also be attributed to the fact that it is a piece of England or Britain glimpsed from the sea—for instance, from a refugee boat: it is the only possible glimpse of England for someone who will never see the whole. Thus, the hallucination forces Art to adopt the perspective of the refugee, the migrant, the stranger, of people who are outside the body politic, broken-off fragments, discarded shards, drifting and trying, as it were, to graft themselves onto another body politic. In *Winter*, this beyond-the-pale perspective is represented by Croatian-Canadian Lux. Coming from a "war-wounded" (246) family, she has dropped out of university and is working in a factory while living as a homeless. It is she who introduces into the world of the novel Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, *Winter*'s chief intertext, a play that is similarly obsessed with images and consequences of fragmentation (another important link is the claim in *Holinshed's Chronicles* [1577–87], Shakespeare's source, that Christ was born during Cymbeline's reign [see Moffet]). This is how the play is summed up by Sophia: "a play about a kingdom subsumed in chaos, lies, powermongering, division and a great deal of poisoning and self-poisoning" (200).

Although *Cymbeline* is not even mentioned in Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin Gish's *Shakespeare and the Body Politic*, the play is clearly an exploration of the idea of the body politic, of sovereignty and leadership in the context of the end of Britain's dependency on Rome (see Hunt).[14] Careful to provide an international context for events unfolding mostly in Britain, *Cymbeline* stages two contrasting views of Britain's role. Isolationism is represented by the scheming Queen and her son, Cloten, who is particularly defiant: "Britain's a world / By itself, and we will nothing pay / For wearing our own noses" (3.1.12–14).[15] In Smith's novel, isolationism is represented by Sophia, who maintains that the bad things happening elsewhere are none of our business. The more open-minded view of Britain's position in the world, held by Iris in *Winter* (139), is voiced by Innogen in Shakespeare's play[16]:

> Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day, night,
> Are they not but in Britain? I'th'world's volume
> Our Britain seems as of it but not in't,
> In a great pool a swan's nest. (3.4.137–40)

Cymbeline, king of Britain as well as Innogen's father, eventually opts for the latter view: his pledge to pay Rome the tribute despite his military victory is a

token of acknowledging that Britain can thrive only as part of the larger international community.

Shakespeare's play is concerned with the premodern version of the metaphor of the body politic, with the king's body standing for the state and the nation. In the prophetic riddle sent by Jupiter and deciphered by the Roman soothsayer Philharmonus, Cymbeline appears as a "stately cedar" with two branches, his two sons stolen by the banished Belarius, lopped off, but the branches are now revived (with the identities of the two sons restored), "jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow" (5.4.440–41). The relevance of the allegory, however, is not limited to the monarch—or rather, the arboreal metaphor of the body politic is supplemented by a non-metaphorical clause: the prophecy makes it clear that the fate of the nation-tree is also linked to that of the young hero, Posthumus: "then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate and flourish in peace and plenty" (5.4.442–43). The limited relevance of the tree metaphor suggests that the country is in the midst of a political crisis where it is not simply the identity of the monarch that is at stake but the very logic of how the monarch is chosen: one type of legitimation is being supplanted by another. The king has no sons—his two abducted sons, living in the wilderness, are unaware of their royal lineage; his stepson, Cloten is clearly unfit for the throne, while orphaned Posthumus is his foster child. Thus, this crisis demands the institution of a new kind of regime and political reality, where, instead of genealogy and bloodlines, the new monarch is selected by a symbolic act of bestowing power upon him. There is another aspect of the prophecy that indicates a shift: it is only in the larger political framework that characters can become aware of their own as well as others' identity. This is crucial as the play and the novel are linked by the many impersonations (Lux is pretending to be Charlotte, whom she has never met), misrecognitions, and misprisions. *Cymbeline* is pervaded by a crisis of misrecognition: the characters, "disassociated parts of dismembered families, do not recognize each other, or themselves, are confused about their roles, their 'parts'" (Nevo 95). The unreadability of "this tableau of headless masterlessness" (Mikalachki 132) emphasizes the confusion of British national identity at a particular historical juncture, with Cymbeline under the thumb of the domineering Queen, and his sons unaware of their lineage. As Lux remarks in *Winter*, in *Cymbeline*, "everybody is pretending to be someone or something else" (200). In fact, some characters are "someone else" without any pretense, simply because they are unaware of their own origin and identity. Such figures include Cymbeline's two sons, renamed and raised by Belarius, but the dead Cloten

might also be seen in this way: his corpse, although he was wearing Posthumus's clothes in order to deceive and to add insult to injury by raping his rival's wife in his rival's usurped clothes, no longer pretends to be someone else's, yet, Innogen "misreads" the body, even claiming to recognize the shape of her beloved Posthumus's calves. In both texts, there are fathers who are not fathers—Belarius is not the biological father of his two sons, while, in the novel, the gay actor Godfrey Gable passes as Art's father (82).[17] Art does not know who his father is—Sophia says she did not want him to inherit the history of Daniel's (Jewish-German) family, ignoring the obvious fact, noted by Lux, that Art has inherited all this anyway (254).

The position of Lux the stranger is occupied in *Cymbeline* by Innogen. Lux is compared to a "broken bird" (79) by Art, while in *Cymbeline*, Innogen (that is, "Fidele," the male page impersonated by her, who is presumed dead) is metaphorized as a dead bird by Arviragus (4.2.198). Still disguised as a page and sitting beside the decapitated body she believes to be that of her husband, she identifies herself to the Roman general Caius Lucius in this way: "I am nothing" (4.2.368). Innogen is like Lux also in the sense that she is both extremely loyal and keeps shifting her identity as well as her allegiances throughout the play: she leaves Belarius and his two sons, who love her dearly, abandons the corpse she believes to be that of her husband, and is ready to betray her kind master, the Roman Lucius. Like Innogen, Lux is working for the good under false pretences, while, also like Innogen, she is many things to many characters. In the novel, where *Cymbeline* plays the role of a Christmas tale, it is Lux who tells the story of the play during the family dinner (198–99).[18] Claiming that it was the beauty of *Cymbeline* that had impelled her to come to Britain (200), she concludes her summary by saying that she intended it as a kind of exemplary tale for the occasion: in the play, people are "living in the same world but separately from each other, like their worlds have somehow become disjointed or broken off each other's worlds" (201); in the end, however, they do realize they inhabit the same world.

Although *Winter* can be read as a rewriting of *Cymbeline*, and many of its themes and motifs echo those of Shakespeare's play,[19] it is pointless to search for systematic correlations, partly because the plot of *Cymbeline* is so chaotic that no single character within the play can articulate it (Mikalachki 132): it is not just the new body politic or community that requires cooperation, but also the articulation of its (hi)story. The point is precisely that both texts are about fragmentation, disarticulation, and wholeness, using the body politic metaphor, with personal and family relations standing for the state of the nation. What links the two texts rather than any particular set of

motifs is their very heterogeneity.[20] Castigated by Samuel Johnson for its "confusion of the names and manners of different times" (Warren 41), *Cymbeline*'s mixture of incompatible characters, plots, themes, conventions, and styles has been noted by many critics (Miola 206–07). Given the entanglement of aesthetic and political preoccupations in *Winter* (just as in many other works by Smith), the political theme of Shakespeare's play is indistinguishable from the formal balance achieved between these heterogeneous elements and impulses, while this equilibrium, in a way that is once again typical of Smith, is in turn inseparable from the effect it had on a character—in this case, Lux, who was attracted to *Cymbeline* by the way a "bitter mess" becomes "a graceful thing" in it (200), suggesting that an emotional and political chaos is resolved into a harmony that is aesthetic as much as political. The vision of cosmic harmony which closes the play is evoked ironically by details like Sophia's recollection of her visit to the London Planetarium (236) and to the Pantheon in Rome (267). While in *Cymbeline* Jupiter majestically descends riding an eagle, in *Winter*, we have an image of Laika orbiting in her capsule (237). The point made by Smith is that the body politic is both an idea that informs actual acts and policies and an aesthetically comprehended form.

On the level of imagery, the key to the way both *Cymbeline* and *Winter* revise the body politic is the image of the headless, dismembered body. Ruth Nevo describes the play itself as a jigsaw puzzle whose broken-apart and mixed-up pieces—like those of its families—must be matched and put together, while, in the political plotline, the confederation of an empire and its province is disrupted. For Nevo, the image of bodily dismemberment takes this fragmentation to a phantasmagoric extreme (95). The second half of the play is dominated by the gruesome image of what Innogen calls "[t]hat headless man I thought to be my lord" (5.4.300–01); earlier, when Posthumus is deceived by the story about Innogen's infidelity, his indignation is expressed in terms that anticipate this image: "O that I had her here, to tear her limb-meal!" (2.4.147). When Innogen realizes what her husband thinks of her, she reacts with a similarly violent image: "I must be ripp'd. To pieces with me!" (3.4.53). Smith's novel similarly abounds in images of dismemberment, more particularly, of decapitation; the rhyme "dead/head" supplies a sinister rhythm or beat to the first half of the text (106, 127). In the story of a murder that goes unpunished for decades, a tale told to Sophia by her old headmaster, that is, her "old head" (40), the murder weapon is "a stone as big as a head" (40). When Charlotte throws the battery of his laptop at Art, he notes that "the thing looked like it could, at the right angle,

decapitate" (60). The MI5 agent who wants Sophia to report on Iris and her friends shows her images of dismemberment and mutilation (133), making his request more emphatic by pushing her down the stairs. Sophia has nightmares of headless torsos and decapitated sculptures (109–10). Yet, the effect of this pervasive imagery is not entirely sinister, as these dismembered and defaced bodies are "more like statements of survival than destruction. They were proof of a new state of endurance, mysterious, headless, faceless, anonymous" (110).

This is precisely the point of the other hallucinatory or surreal element in *Winter*, the child's head floating in the air that becomes Sophia's companion during the days leading up to Christmas. The head starts its existence as a par excellence phenomenological object: as an "abrasion, degeneration, detachment, floater" in Sophia's eyes (19),[21] not even looking like a head, small as a fly or as a tiny sputnik, bobbing about like a helium balloon (20). As it gradually assumes the features of a child's head, it also begins to behave like a child "joyful" (19) in its ricocheting and bouncing to and fro. It is attracted to living things, especially to plants: it enjoys floating in and out between the dusty twigs of a collection of dead orchids on the lower landing (9); it floats to the windowsill to sniff at the thyme, rubbing its forehead against it (11); in the garden, it navigates towards the leylandii cypresses (20), and brings back a holly sprig, offering it to Sophia (22). Sophia sees it as "a smudged dusty child streaked with green, a child come home covered in grass-stains, a summer child in the winter lights" (19). At this stage of its incessant metamorphosis, the head itself becomes hybrid, assuming vegetal attributes: a "lacy green growth, leafy looking, a tangle of minuscule leaves and fronds, had thickened and crisped round its nostrils and upper lip like dried nasal mucus" (28), and the same growth is sprouting out of the ears (29). Sophia is reminded of Édouard Boubat's 1947 photograph (*La petite fille aux feuilles mortes*) of a young child, standing in a park and covered in dead leaves (8).[22] She treats the head as a person, as a child, mothering it as "her very own Christmas infant" (111), letting it sleep in her bed, rest on her chest and shoulder. Most importantly, the child seems to reawaken in her the numbed ability to feel, that is, to feel for, to empathize with someone else. Contemplating the floating head, Sophia suddenly thinks of its bodilessness as the outcome of some calamity, visualizing the torso with limbs that might be wandering around looking for its head, and thinks of the tragic loss that resulted in this truncated child (29). "Now she felt pain play through her like a fine-tuned many-stringed music and her the instrument. Because how could losing so much of a self *not* hurt?" (30). This is Sophia's moment of empathy,

a crucial factor in the affective economy of Ali Smith's imagined body politic. As Catherine Bernard suggests, empathy is the key to Smith's "democratic narrativity through which radical political loss and want may at last be articulated and felt. It is the tongue of the re-affected body politic."

The alteration of the head, however, does not stop here: it begins to lose its hair, becoming increasingly like the sculpted head of a Roman statue (108). The end of the process is the moment when it becomes a perfect marble sphere (141–42). (We are not in a position to know this, yet the object in fact regains its "original" form and identity as the smaller half of the Hepworth sculpture, the sphere stolen by Sophia from Daniel and kept in a secret place, under the floorboards in her wardrobe.) Despite the presence of disturbing images of headlessness, the child's head seems to be genuinely harmless—at least, this is how Sophia apprehends is. Rather than a ghostly or terrifying severed head, it exudes some essential serenity and benignity—or, to use one of Lux's words, "bounteousness" (157). This benignity is reinforced by the cephalophore figures in the text. Sophia recalls living near a place in her childhood where "someone called Newlina's father cut her head off because she wouldn't do what he said" (174). According to the legend, Newlina—a British princess—simply picked her head up and walked away. In legends, she became a fertility figure: she could "simply stick pieces of broken branch in the ground and they'd turn into trees with fruits already on them" (175). The figurative logic of the narrative suggests that the head is not a privileged part of the body: it can be lopped off like a limb—in fact, given the pervasive vegetal metaphorics of the story, decapitation looks like the cutting back of flowers or the pollarding of trees: a beneficial mutilation in order to facilitate growth and rebirth.

In *Cymbeline*, with its premodern idea of the body politic metaphor, headlessness signifies tragedy for the individual (body) and augurs anomie for the body politic. When, in the most striking scene of the play, Innogen wakes up from the drug-induced swoon only to find herself beside a headless torso, she embraces the decapitated body and grieves over it: "O Posthumus, where is thy head?" (4.2.321).[23] Smith's novel reimagines the body politic as essentially different: the head, like other organs and body parts, is something of a moveable feast inasmuch as it keeps changing both its place and its form. If a new body politic is conceivable or imaginable at all, it has to be radically different from the hierarchical body politic of premodern and early modern political theory. *Winter*'s use of the motif suggests an aversion to the idea of the organic, homogeneous, and impregnable body politic that lends itself easily to ideologies of purity, exclusion, and cleansing—the idea or image of

the English landscape has been put to use as a milder form of the trope, both figuring and grounding it. The political resonances of the image of the decapitated but joyful body evoke John Protevi's Deleuzian critique of what, following Gilbert Simondon, he calls hylomorphism, "the doctrine that production is the result of an (architectural) imposition of a transcendent form on a chaotic and/or passive matter" (8). From a non-hylomorphic position, "form must be seen as suggested by the matter rather than as the pure product of the mind of the architect. In other words, forms are not pure but already laden with 'variable intensive affects' and thus tied to 'material traits of expression', that is, actual properties linked with virtual potentials or singularities suggesting ways of working with and transforming the material" (7). In a non-hylomorphic conception of bodies politic, "changes in a field are attributed to changes in the arrangement of its immanent elements" (8) rather than to a superior, designing mind or, as it were, head. The political import of this theoretical metaphor is spelt out by Simon Critchley, paraphrasing Claude Lefort and Georges Bataille: "Democracy entails a disincorporation of the body politic, which begins with a literal or metaphorical act of decapitation. . . . In Bataille's terms, democracy is the headless community of *Acéphale*" (80).[24] While *Winter*'s proliferation of headless figures might indeed recall Georges Bataille's transgressive imaginary figure of the Acéphale (Headless), Smith's treatment of headlessness lacks the ponderous solemnity of Bataille. Yet, it might be claimed that her alternative body politic is a body without organs—that is, a body in which the constituent parts are not fully defined by their function in the organism or machinery of the state (for similarly radical but different models, see Protevi or Alphonso Lingis). Nor are these parts stable in the sense of having fixed identities. They keep changing—like the floating head—but this change is not so much metamorphosis, with its implications of a set destination and a trajectory, as an alteration: a more tentative and always unfinished process, like the "joyful" (19), bouncing, tentative, and directionless movement of the child's head. The alterations are the result of interactions with other entities. In this sense, the child's head—or the spherical stone which it seems to be—is as important an element of the community as any of the characters, among whom "the stranger, Lux" (153) is an ideal member or 'organ' of the new body politic. She is both a figure of autonomy and a figure of care, always acting upon the needs of whoever is most needful and attending to these immediate needs. This is clear from the scene of their arrival in the house. Finding his mother nearly catatonic and shivering in her warm clothes, Art wants to call a doctor, while Lux

immediately removes the heavy clothes and tries to soothe Sophia (84). It is due to the influence of Lux—and of the head—that the house is allowed to become, if only for a few Christmas days, something like an intimation of the body politic envisioned by Smith: the house, itself both a head and a body—its Cornish name, Chei Bres, means "House of the mind, of the head, of the psyche" (270)—that welcomes broken people, heterogeneous fragments and halves.

This is also where the Nativity story becomes relevant—a story that is told, however falteringly, by Sophia to the child's head (107). One distinctive feature of Smith's texts is their tendency to open up towards the archetypal, the mythical, and the metaphysical. Although, as we have seen, this opening up is questioned and partially revoked in the case of vegetal symbols, other motifs consistently evoke archetypal, archaic, even sacred resonances: storytelling and hospitality are prominent among them. According to Dominic Head, Smith's "central conceit" is "the guest who outstays his welcome" (103), the outsider "capable of puncturing the bubble of selfish privilege" (102). In *Winter*, given the context provided by the body politic and the Christmas setting, there is more to this motif. The Nativity story is relevant mainly because it is about the holiness of hospitality, of homemaking.[25] When Art and Lux arrive, Sophia, who seems unaware of any Christmas arrangement, says that they will have to sleep in the barn (85). Lux does settle into the barn, arousing evocations of the Biblical manger by her mere presence, while Art and Iris occupy the uninhabited, unfurnished rooms upstairs: they are all trying to create a makeshift shelter, a home from the materials that are at hand. The gesture of bearing gifts is part of this archetypal opening up: Iris arrives loaded with a cornucopia of vegetables and comes in last carrying a tree in a pot, "an ordinary little tree with no leaves" but covered with fluff not unlike that growing on the child's head; her "star magnolia" (156) is a vegetal or arboreal version of the star of Bethlehem. The playful climax of this archetypal expansion is the arrival of the busload of birdwatchers in search of a wandering warbler, a hoax invented by Charlotte in order to discredit Art's nature blog. The birdwatchers, unexpectedly, are all made to feel welcome by Sophia as well as the others: they are given food and drink, as well as free use of Sophia's otherwise sacrosanct laptop. They are like the three magi, flocking here because they have heard of a wondrous event (a first British sighting of a Canada warbler) and wishing to be part of this miracle that is no less wondrous for being secular.

This aspect of the novel also brings us back to the issue of aesthetic form—and the limits of the power of the aesthetic. Sophia's house has "many

rooms" (153), as many, perhaps, as Henry James's house of fiction has windows (James 45). To Art, for instance, the rooms seem to be innumerable (153). Thus, there is an internal infinity within the house, a diversity within its restricted space. If Chei Bres is a utopian body politic, it is also the house of fiction, of art—in the sense that the kind of beauty and harmony attainable within it is limited by the relevance of art. The aesthetic nature of the fragile equilibrium is indicated by the intimation of an overarching allegorical framework in the novel, one suggested by the names of the two sisters (in fact, of the four main characters). Sophia with her rationality might be said to stand for Logos, while Iris, who is routinely called a "mythologiser" by her sister (155), is a figure of Mythos, who, upon her arrival in Chei Bres, is seen by Art as "a myth of the bounteous world" (155). Art was raised by the two of them (the circumstances are not entirely clear), while Lux is necessary for the reconciliation of the two principles. The name "Iris" (she is Juno's handmaiden and messenger as well as a rainbow figure) does not simply evoke mythology: in her cameo appearance in the "Alcyone and Ceyx" episode of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book XI, Iris also embodies the faculty of imagination and fiction-making. King Ceyx sets out on a sea voyage despite the premonitions of his loving wife, Alcyone, and is killed in a sea storm, but his wife is hoping against hope that he will return. Taking pity on Alcyone, who is stuck between hope and grief, Juno commands Iris to go to the palace of Somnus and tell the god of dreams to send Alcyone a dream that will show her what happened to her husband. Thus, it is a false vision, a mirage that shows Alcyone the truth about her husband and sets off the process that will lead to the miraculous reunion of the couple in a metamorphosed form. In *Winter*, both Sophia and Art suffer from what Sophia calls "Iris nightmares" (240, 243), induced by her tales of nuclear holocaust, ecological tragedy, and the fate of Laika. Iris, the mythologist is, however, not enough to create the utopian body politic that is also an aesthetic form. Just like her mythological counterpart, she is only a messenger and not the source of the healing fiction.

Harmony is possible only in art, as in that of the two pieces that make up the Hepworth sculpture (251).[26] Contemplating the sculpture in Daniel's flat, Sophia recalls the famous anecdote about the drawing of a circle being the most perfect work of art. Learning that the artist in the story is Giotto, Sophia thanks Daniel "for making the story real, about a real person, not just a myth. It's a story I have known since I was little. I didn't know it was true" (274). Remarking that the story is probably apocryphal, Daniel adds: "We are all apocrypha" (274). That is, we are all stories left out of the definitive holy book—and therefore the factuality of stories does not matter so much. The

dichotomy between Mythos and Logos (Iris and Sophia) is subverted: what matters is the effect a story has on the listener. Like the Christmas story that, at one point, had been told to Art both by Sophia and by Iris, only for these distinct occasions to merge in his mind. Or like the fake tweet sent out by spiteful Charlotte from Art's account. It is not simply that the tweet fills thousands of birdwatchers with hope, but that the birdwatchers—the Christmas guests, the chasers of the Bethlehem star themselves who, through their willingness to give credit to the unlikely story, bring about the secular miracle, the gift of the good news: news of actual sightings of Canada warblers all over Britain.

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Notes

1 While *Winter* is linked to the other volumes of the tetralogy in multiple ways, both on the level of the plot and on that of motifs, a close reading of the entire sequence would be beyond the scope of this essay.

2 Smith's Scottishness plays a less prominent role in this text than in *Spring*.

3 Similar figures include Amber in *The Accidental* (2005) and the young girl called Florence in *Spring*—although in Smith's fiction any character can play a similarly and serendipitously liberating and self-revealing role for anyone else.

4 Smith's strategy is akin to those adopted by the new ecologically guided landscape poetry and New Nature Writing, and by ecocriticism.

5 It is especially the paintings of Alan Reynolds that offer instructive analogies to Smith's strategies. Initially celebrated as a Neo-Romantic landscape artist in the spirit of the English pastoral, but increasingly influenced by Klee's semi-abstract landscapes, Reynolds frequently adopts an unusual, ground-level perspective, with a meticulously detailed close-

up of a plant in the foreground, while other landscape details are stylized (139), which lends his works a surreal, faerie lightness of touch as well as constructivist effect (Gaskin 138–39).

6 For a phenomenological reading of Hepworth's art that reckons with the centrality of landscape, see Rachel Smith. See also Potts (213–34).

7 "The ways in which Hepworth was photographed with her sculptures indicate how she imagined the physical relationship between her works and the human figure. In most photographs where Hepworth posed with her works, she looks directly into them, makes physical contact with their inner forms or frames herself within their shapes" (Rachel Smith). As Smith notes, Hepworth was delighted to see the traces of visitors' touches on her works.

8 Hepworth made several, more or less different versions of this image over the years, some of them also featuring her trademark strings.

9 Set up in 1981 in protest against nuclear weapons, the camp existed until 2000. The base itself closed down at the end of the Cold War, its site a public parkland since 1997.

10 The ribbons and pieces of wool threaded into the wire are "lines of flight" that, rather than connecting two points, subvert the gridding (the garlands, the human chain, and so forth). On the textual level, puns might be claimed to play a similar role: they hijack the text, suddenly veering it off its track, creating loops and flourishes on the basis of acoustic coincidence.

11 Trees, like so many other motifs, also have an archetypal aspect in Smith, as exemplified by the small potted magnolia tree, Iris's gift when she arrives (156).

12 This passage also indicates that, while Smith has often been analyzed as an Ovidian writer and she herself has reinforced this impression (see Ranger 397–99), the metamorphic nature of her texts has as much, if not more, to do with Deleuzian becoming and Surrealist alteration as with Ovidian metamorphosis. The only properly Ovidian metamorphosis of the novel occurs in Art's nightmare, when, chased by giant flowers, he tries to escape by transforming into one of the prostrate stone figures above the tombs in a church (151–52). This scene is Ovidian both in terms of the excess of emotion that translates or transmutes into physical metamorphosis and in terms of its finality. There are also traces of the story of Daphne, a pervasive presence in *Autumn*. In the scene when she first meets Daniel, sitting on the circular bench around a giant tree, Sophia "can feel the ridges in its bark through her coat" (260). While this echoes the Ovidian text—"her tender bosom / was wrapped in thin smooth bark" (I.551–52)—and could in fact be the beginning of a metamorphosis, this is not the case: Sophia does not change. For an Ovidian reading of the *Quartet*, see Orosz-Réti.

13 Perhaps one more scene can be added to this list: when, during her eye test, Sophia is astonished and touched to see "the branchwork in her own blood vessels" (15).

14 Written in the period when England was transforming from a postcolonial nation to an empire state (Maley 31), *Cymbeline* has since been read as "a dramatic endorsement of the Roman roots of Britishness" (Maley 33) and as a play that aims to explore the complexities of early modern attempts to recover English national origins (Mikalachki 118).

15 The same view is expressed in the Queen's defiant celebration of Britain (3.1.18–22), which echoes Voadicea's speech in Holinshed (Warren 39).

16 I follow Roger Warren's OUP edition in the spelling of the characters' names.

17 *Winter* makes the connection with the Nativity story, referring to Joseph as the "father not a father" (107).

18 Among the others, it is Sophia who seems to be familiar with it: she quotes the dirge that reappears as a leitmotif in *Mrs Dalloway* (200).

19 One important motif linking the two texts is that of poison. In the novel, it is associated with ecological disasters (as in Jeanette Winterson's 1989 *Sexing the Cherry*, another novel that connects the contemporary and the early modern world), and with the gas used against demonstrators, that is, with systematic violence—including what Rob Nixon calls slow violence.

20 Lux's figure also evokes Posthumus Leonatus. Her hallucination at the age of seventeen, when, walking in Toronto, she suddenly feels the weight of all her ancestors upon her shoulders (287), is comparable to Posthumus's dream vision of his dead father and brothers (5.3.124–86).

21 That the vision is not unrelated to her sister is suggested by one of the questions she comes across when she is trying to find out what is wrong with her: "Do You Have a Spot on Your Iris?" (13).

22 The head is frequently apprehended through the filter of art (which is not surprising, given its provenance). When it settles next to the fruitbowl, this makes the table look like an art joke, an installation or a painting by Magritte, Dalí, De Chirico, Duchamp, and Cézanne (11).

23 The absence of a head on the body politic is also something to be remedied in *Titus Andronicus*, where Titus is called upon by Marcus to "help to set a head on headless Rome" (1.1.186).

24 Bataille's writings that expound the idea (see especially "The Sacred Conspiracy") are to be found in his *Visions of Excess*.

25 Home and homemaking are sustained metaphors throughout. When, for instance, Iris is telling Sophia about the refugees in Greece, she emphasizes how you need "experience in how to put together out of nothing a place for people to live in or sleep" (232).

26 In *Summer*, the stolen sphere is finally returned to Daniel by Art (who is his son, even though neither of the two are aware of this). Daniel is connected to many characters of the quartet in ways that are far from apparent to the characters themselves, including Daniel himself.

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