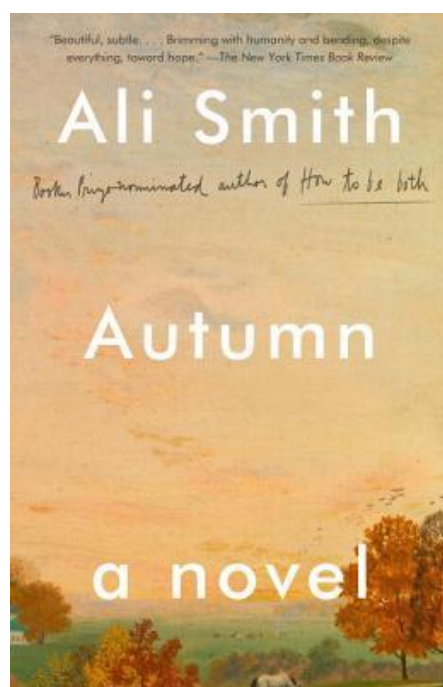




Autumn

Ali Smith

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Autumn

Ali Smith

Autumn Ali Smith

MAN BOOKER PRIZE FINALIST

Long-listed for the Gordon Burn Prize

One of the *New York Times* 10 Best Books of the Year

A *Washington Post* Notable Book

One of the Best Books of the Year: NPR, Dwight Garner/*The New York Times*, Martha Kearney/*The Guardian*, *Southern Living*, *The Morning News*, *Kirkus Reviews*

Autumn. Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. Two old friends--Daniel, a centenarian, and Elisabeth, born in 1984--look to both the future and the past as the United Kingdom stands divided by a historic, once-in-a-generation summer. Love is won, love is lost. Hope is hand-in-hand with hopelessness. The seasons roll round, as ever.

A luminous meditation on the meaning of richness and harvest and worth, *Autumn* is the first installment of Ali Smith's Seasonal quartet, and it casts an eye over our own time: Who are we? What are we made of? Shakespearean jeu d'esprit, Keatsian melancholy, the sheer bright energy of 1960s pop art. Wide-ranging in time-scale and light-footed through histories, *Autumn* is an unforgettable story about aging and time and love--and stories themselves.

Autumn Details

Date : Published October 17th 2017 by Anchor Books (first published October 20th 2016)

ISBN : 9781101969946

Author : Ali Smith

Format : Paperback 260 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary, Literary Fiction, Novels

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From Reader Review Autumn for online ebook

Trish says

It is November and outside my front door roses are still blooming. Their color is a deep rich clear pink. They look better than they did in the dry heat of summer.

Smith's first novel in her proposed quartet of volumes is an utter delight. I'd never encountered her voice before but when I got to the end, I looked again at the beginning. Just as well, because I had forgotten that Daniel speaks, briefly, before the story gets picked up by "his granddaughter," Elisabeth, with an "s."

What I find queer, now having finished the novel, is why people talk about this as a Brexit novel. It is a novel of our times, told by a smart and savvy observer, but I would have put the emphasis squarely on the exploitation and disregard of women, their work, their point of view. Especially at this moment of lurid sexual scandal with roots supposedly in the 1960's, "when the ethos was different," we hear a voice that pierces that veil of ignorance and disregard and looks squarely at the mystery of history. Smith has caught our moment perfectly.

The real beauty of this novel is the heart of the novelist. She sees the hard truths we negotiate every day and does not deny them but looks instead at our vulnerabilities, and how we need one another to perfect our world. The work is something reminiscent of pop art, jazzy and clever but with echoes...instead of a piece of pink lace stuck variously under paint on the canvas, a memory...of children washing up on a beach, or women being pushed and herded onto buses...so slight a mention they are mere shadows.

But then Daniel asks explicitly, the first time they play Bagatelle, "Sure you want war?" before patiently instructing Elisabeth in the importance of diversity of thought: how the idea of 'threatening' is not unidirectional and can all be in one's own mind. Daniel becomes companion, teacher, friend to adolescent Elisabeth, dismissed by Elisabeth's mother as 'that old queen.'

What to make of Elisabeth's mother? (view spoiler)

Smith marks time in this novel by describing the physical environment, the state of the roses, the chill in the air, the gossamer filaments of spider webs bearing beads, the color and position of leaves (on the trees, fallen to the ground). It positions us in a shifting timescape, through Daniel's lifetime, and encapsulating the art of the first (and only?) female pop artist in Britain. Pauline Boty was...dismissed is too intentional a word...ignored during her career as an artist because she was beautiful and female. It makes one want to pair those two descriptors forever, in solidarity.

"And whoever makes up the story makes up the world...So always try to welcome people into the home of your story..."

I felt welcomed into the kindnesses Smith creates in this novel. There is wickedness in the world, and tragedy, but it doesn't have to define us. We can create a world that turns inexorably, like the seasons, to longer days and more clement weather. And we can find people to love in the most unlikely places. Love is the [only?] thing that makes life worthwhile.

This novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2017.

Fionnuala says

What are you reading?

A tale of two people.

Tell me about it.

It's a book full of leaves, green ones and brown ones. And white ones too, of course.

Ha! But seriously, describe it to me.

It's a book with a hole in the middle.

Now you're just being absurd.

No, wait. There's really as much absence as presence in this book.

Tell me what's in it - not what's not in it.

It's a book of fragments that fit together in odd arrangements.

Give me an example of the way the fragments fit together.

There's a sister who doesn't exist and a sister who no longer exists.

Not bad. Give me another fragment.

There are people who use the word Home when they really mean Away, as in Go ----.

Oh, right. Brexit.

There are lies about lying about lies about lying.

Please give me something that's not about politicians.

There's a time that's really a place.

Give me something less abstract.

A giant soldier squashes a woman with his boot.

Argh!! Don't tell me any more about this book.

Would it be ok if it wasn't a giant soldier but just a man, and he squashed a mouse not a person?

No! Definitely not! Maybe you could tell me what isn't in the book instead of giving me such freaky fragments.

===== ===== =====

Why are you holding your breath like that?

Because the unsaid in this book lies in the gaps between breaths.

Normal people don't have gaps in their breathing.

A person who is breathing his last might - if he had enough luck to die leisurely.

So what do those gaps tell about?

The black hole in twentieth century history.

Just say the Holocaust.

Did you know 'holo' means 'whole' and 'caust' means destroyed by fire?

So?

So the entire word means an absence in a presence, the 'hole' in 'whole'.

Wait a minute. Is that interpretation of the term 'Holocaust' in the book?

Well, no. But you can sort of read it between the leaves...

Dianne says

I'm not sure I can do justice to reviewing this or explaining what it is about - I suspect each time it's read, a new layer is revealed and it becomes something quite different. Let me just say the writing and wordplay is superb! Imaginative, perceptive, unexpectedly quite funny in places, and tender in others. I'd say the resounding theme in this book is loss - summer gives way to autumn in the seasons and in our lives, but there is beauty to be found in the journey.

Don't go in to this expecting a plot, at least in not in the traditional sense. It's more like a half-remembered dream with two central characters who weave in and out of each other's lives, reliving their separate memories and experiences against the backdrop of various British touchpoints (the Profumo political scandal, the Pop Art movement, Brexit). Just go with the flow - read it once for the pleasure of the written word, then again to grasp the complexities of the plot threads and the cultural references.

I loved it - I can see why this made the Booker shortlist and is one of the favorites to win.

Thanks for NetGalley and Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group for an ARC of this lovely novel.

Simon says

I really enjoyed Autumn, which is possibly Ali Smith's most accessible book yet, however I wasn't as wholly blown away by it as most people. I mean it's still BRILLIANT because it's Ali Smith. I adored the story of Daniel and Elisabeth over the years, I loved how Elizabeth's mother developed. I agreed politically

on Brexit and her observations of the good and bad... the art bit though just didn't feel needed and dragged me away from what I was loving. And loving so much. Just my thoughts. Will be heading to Winter soon.

Ilse says

This is England

Autumn is to be the first instalment of 'a seasonal quartet' that Ali Smith plans to write - a cycle 'exploring the subjective experience of time, questioning the nature of time itself'. Triggered to read it by the title – autumn is my favourite season – this first instalment was a wondrous introduction to Smith's prose for me, so I eagerly look forward to the next parts now.

Autumn is a playful, multi-layered and at times delectably subversive novel on the floating of time, aging, identity, art, love and friendship, grounded knee-deep in the grim realities of today's post-truth politics, against the backdrop of the aftermath of the Brexit-vote.

Set right here, right now, the story time-travels back and forth between the past and the present. Since primary school, Elisabeth, now 32 and an art history lecturer, and her next-door neighbour, Daniel Gluck, about 70 years her senior, are close friends. Both soulmates are bruised - Elisabeth is fatherless and Daniel is alone. From flashbacks and dreams, we learn from their childhood and past. While Daniel – a collector of 'arty art' - has awakened Elisabeth's sensibility to art and honed her skills of critical thinking, encouraging her to be a girl 'reading the world', Elisabeth now spends hours next to his bed while he dozes off in a care home, reading Shakespeare and Huxley to him.

What you reading? Always be reading something, he said. Even when we're not physically reading. How else will we read the world? Think of it as a constant.

Smith parallels two key moments in recent history and present day UK by connecting them both to dishonesties in politics, suggesting these lies had critical impact on society, the Brexit vote and the Profumo Scandal of 1963. She astutely smuggles the latter into the novel by interlacing the scandal and the life of her main characters, Daniel and Elisabeth, with the vibrant and tragically short life of **Pauline Boty** (1938-1966), the only female representative artist in British Pop Art, whose legacy is continuously oscillating between oblivion and rediscovery. Pauline Boty used a shot of the famous chair photograph series by Lewis Morley of the women at the heart of the Profumo scandal, Christine Keeler, in a collage painting which has been mysteriously missing soon after she had painted it, **Scandal '63**.

To say the least, these lies make people sick: *She hadn't known that proximity to lies, even just reading about them, could make you feel so ill.* By showing the effect of lies by the powerful on society, how they divide people and infuriate them, Smith makes one ponder on the significance of truth. Is there really anything new under the sun in this acrimonious year of the prevalence of post-truth politics? Or it is just an illustration of the unchangeable nature of power and the corroded order of things?

By reviving feminist artist Pauline Boty, Smith thematises the position of women in modern art. Some titles of Boty's paintings, like 'It's a man's world' speak volumes in that respect. Smith's Boty proclaims *I am a person. I'm an intelligent nakedness. An intellectual body. I'm a bodily intelligence. Art's full of nudes and*

I'm a thinking, choosing nude. I'm the artist as nude. I'm the nude as artist'.. This assertion reminded me of the mission statement of the Guerrilla Girls, a feminist group denouncing discrimination, tracking and keeping statistics on the representation of female artists in museums. Art still is a man's world, to a very high extent.

However obvious Smith's sympathies in the debate, do not expect pure doom and gloom. Instead of wallowing in woeful defeatism, the characters shine in heart-warming and infectious combativeness and witty insurgence. The Kafkaesque scenes at the post office resemble absurdist sketches, while they are at the same time a virulent critique on the ridiculously bureaucratic demands regulation imposes on people - and on a society that turns a blind eye to the homeless which have to shelter in public buildings, without anyone blinking.

The energetic pace of the writing, brimming with jocular wordplay, literary references and puns smoothly coincides with the melancholic undercurrent of this novel, as **Autumn** breathes an atmosphere of transience. People die, at young age. Everything is temporary, like the leaves falling in autumn. Entering history equals finding 'endless sad fragility':

Elisabeth had last come to the field just after the circus had left, especially to look at the flat dry place where the circus had had its tent. She liked doing melancholy things like that. But now you couldn't tell that any of these summer things had ever happened. There was just an empty field. The sports tracks had faded and gone. The flattened grass, the places that had turned to mud where the crowds had wandered round between the rides and the open-sided trucks of the driving and shooting games, the ghost circus ring: nothing but grass.

Il faut reculer pour mieux sauter. Perhaps one could say that Ali Smith in a way indulges in facile preaching to the choir, mollycoddling the right-minded citizens mourning the present state of the world. But why not just delight in her eloquently phrased discourse and lithe sentences, nodding approvingly while licking one's wounds instead of sinking into despair? Fite dem Back.

I thank NetGalley, Penguin and Ali Smith for granting me an ARC.

Hannah says

My thoughts are all over the place for this book – maybe fitting because this is what this book is as well: all over the place. There is undeniable brilliance here: sentences so profound they made me stop in my tracks, word plays so wonderful I had to read them twice, musing on a great number of important things. It comes as no surprise that Ali Smith is a genius. But for some reasons these sparks of brilliance never came together for a coherent whole for me – and I guess this was also the point. There is no proper coherence in life and in art and Ali Smith captures this perfectly.

At the core of this book is the friendship between Elisabeth and her older neighbour Daniel and the profound effect on her life he has – opening to her a world of art and cleverness. This book is also filled with musings on art – especially that by women – and how art is both important and prone to being forgotten.

This relationship somehow did not work for me – I think I would have needed it to be more fleshed out. The wonderful glitzy stylistic framework was not enough for me. Somehow I was lacking an emotional core for this book to really resonate with me. This lack was reinforced by the secondary storyline of Pauline Boty. This could have been so interesting but ultimately fell flat for me. Mostly because I did not have the necessary knowledge to contextualize what Ali Smith was telling me. This feeling of lack of knowledge worked against me multiple times during this book.

I think, ultimately, I might have read the book wrong: I think it would have worked better for me if I had read this in one sitting, allowing myself to be swept up in the stylistic whimsy. This way the book would not have felt disjointed but rather a perfect microscopic view of one single moment in time. This moment being the aftermath of Brexit – which is something that is very close to my heart. I have lived in the UK for 5 years, 4 of those in Scotland and as such I have so many feelings about the UK leaving the EU. Especially because the months leading up to the Referendum were filled with xenophobic and racist discourse and because many people voting for leaving the UK voted for exactly those reasons. I am disappointed in the country I felt so welcome in, a country that is so wonderful and has so much to offer, and I am disappointed that people my age just did not go and vote (how idiotic is that?) and I am sorry for my friends who are still there, both those from the UK and those from abroad. Because this Referendum will change the country and there is no stopping this. (That was a tangent.)

First sentence: “It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times.”

Barry Pierce says

Hailed as the first post-Brexit novel, in *Autumn* Ali Smith proves to us all that she is probably the greatest writer currently working in the United Kingdom. The fact that this novel was published a mere four months after the disastrous Brexit vote but yet analyses its aftermath as a central theme shows a turnaround that is nearly insane. Smith must have practically vomited this novel into her word processor, which makes its utter flawlessness almost divine.

The novel begins with a man, Daniel Gluck, who seems to have washed up on a beach. Believing he has died he casts his eye along the beach and sees even more like him. The corpses of refugees line the beach, interspersed between lounging sunbathers and laughing children who seem to take no notice of the corpses around them. This opening scene demonstrates Smith's intent with *Autumn*, she is writing a Zeitgeist novel.

Luckily for Daniel, this scene is all a dream, as he is in a coma. Most days, in the chair beside him is a woman who the nurses believe is his granddaughter. She is no relation. She is Elisabeth (with an S) Demand (from the French, Du Monde). She is the tentpole upon which this novel drapes. *Autumn* is an exploration of her life and of those around her. But it is also a study of every person living in Great Britain post-Brexit. It is the story of Christine Keeler, yes THAT Christine Keeler, of Profumo fame. And it is the story of Pauline Boty. But I'll let you discover the wonder that she was.

Autumn is oftentimes hilarious, touching, informative and playful. Smith is still the master of structure and form and plays around with each like a master conductor. There are no flaws in this novel. If I had read it when it was published *Autumn* would have by far been my favourite novel of the year. Ali Smith can do no wrong.

Diane S ? says

Ali Smith is not an easy author to read and yet her words and thoughts are beautiful. If you like a linear plot, you will not find it here, though it is mostly set in the period after Brexit, it goes back and forth in time. To a friendship between a young girl and an elderly man, a man who had quite a past, which is slowly uncovered. The thoughts expressed about Brexit are the same many are expressing here in the states after our recent election. Wonderfully and adroitly expressed about the way many of us feel.

She loves to play with words, play with scenes, this is sometimes challenging but if you just read, not expecting her to follow the supposed rules of fiction, these things are often delightful. She explores time, it's passing, autumn into winter, past into present, young into old, as the seasons change so do we. She throws in a pop artist, the Christine Keeler scandal, which I had to look up not being from Britain. Her description of the natural world absolutely gorgeous. As I was reading at times I was frustrated, wondering where could she possibly be going with this? Why does she throw this in? Yet, at books end I find myself thinking of what she wrote, wishing I understood more, but finding it nonetheless undeniably imprinted in my mind. May have to reread at a later point.

ARC from publisher.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I was going to save this to read in the autumn, but then it was included in the Man Booker Prize Long List so I moved it up.

This is described as a post-Brexit novel, and it does take place in that world and mentions it a few times in a few different ways, but more in the way that all of us continue in the world as it changes around us.

"...I'm tired of the news. I'm tired of the way it makes things spectacular that aren't, and deals so simplistically with what's truly appalling. I'm tired of the vitriol. I'm tired of the anger. I'm tired of the meanness. I'm tired of the selfishness. I'm tired of how we're doing nothing to stop it. I'm tired of how we're encouraging it. I'm tired of the violence there is and I'm tired of the violence that's on its way, that's coming, that hasn't happened yet. I'm tired of liars. I'm tired of sanctified liars. I'm tired of how those liars have let this happen. I'm tired of having to wonder whether they did it out of stupidity or did it on purpose. I'm tired of lying government. I'm tired of people not caring whether they're being lied to any more. I'm tired of being made to feel this fearful. I'm tired of animosity. I'm tired of pusillanimosity.

I don't think that's actually a word, Elisabeth says.

I'm tired of not knowing the right words, her mother says."

The central story, at least for me, is the love story of sorts between Elisabeth and her elderly neighbor, Daniel. We see them in many different iterations, during her childhood (where her mother wanted her to stay away from him) through her adulthood when she is his only visitor while he is unconscious in a hospital. He encourages her to be a reader, to use her imagination, to think.

"We have to hope, Daniel was saying, that the people who love us and who know us a little bit will in the end have seen us truly. In the end, not much else matters."

There is an art storyline too, about the sole female UK pop artist Pauline Boty, who turns out to be a real person (see [here](#)).

But what Ali Smith always does that moves every book by her from four stars to five is in the writing. It is at times stream of consciousness, at times poetic, at times sparse, at times incredibly moving. I enjoyed reading it and feel like I barely scratched the surface in the first time through.

Hugh says

My fourth book from the Booker longlist, this is another that, like *Reservoir 13*, would have made a worthy winner. At the time of its release this book was billed as the first Brexit novel, but there is so much more to it than that.

update 19 Oct - Sadly, and yet again, Ali Smith did not win, but I was very impressed by her performance and the way she encouraged Emily Fridlund and Fiona Mozley at the Nottingham shortlist readings event, which I attended last week (the other three shortlisted writers were not there).

Reservoir 13 is out, so this is my clear favourite book in the shortlist

Smith starts by introducing two characters - Daniel Gluck, who is 101 and clinging to life in a care home, and Elisabeth Demand, who was born in 1984 and knew him as a child when he was her neighbour. In the first part of the book Elisabeth is confronted by various decaying public institutions and the petty jobsworths who enforce the rules - the early scene in which she fights with the post office over a passport application is very funny. These are mixed up with her memories of her conversations with Daniel as a child in which he encouraged her to think differently, and her visits to Daniel in the care home where he spends most of his time asleep.

As in many of her other books (notably *Like and There but for the*), Smith writes very powerfully and sympathetically about intelligent children and how they learn. In this section Daniel introduces Elisabeth to the work of Pauline Boty, the other main subject of the book, by describing some of her lost paintings. Daniel remembers meeting and being obsessed by Boty, and also has an immigrant backstory of his own.

Boty was a leading pop artist in 60s London, who died young and was subsequently written out of history by the male critics of the time and her family's refusal to exhibit her work. Her life and work is described in glowing detail, along with one of her inspirations, Christine Keeler. The tone of the book changes from the disillusion and resignation Elisabeth feels when confronted with the British cultural changes that led to the Brexit vote to a form of hope embodied by Boty and her defiant flaunting of the expectations of her suburban middle class family.

This is a richly rewarding novel of ideas, and as always Smith flits between her themes lightly. Smith is a national treasure, and this is one of her best books. This is the first of a projected four seasonally themed novels, and I look forward to the rest.

Paul says

This is not only the first of four novels based on the seasons, but it has also been acclaimed as the first Brexit novel. This makes it very British in some ways and the feelings in the country and the reactions to the vote

form part of the novel, as in this much quoted piece:

“All across the country, there was misery and rejoicing. All across the country, what had happened whipped about by itself as if a live electric wire had snapped off a pylon in a storm and was whipping about in the air above the trees, the roofs, the traffic. All across the country, people felt it was the wrong thing. All across the country, people felt it was the right thing. All across the country, people felt they’d really lost. All across the country, people felt they’d really won.”

With this backdrop the novel moves easily over the last hundred years through its main characters. Daniel Gluck is a century old, Jewish and in a care home. Elisabeth was born in 1984; during her childhood in the 1990s she lived next to Daniel Gluck and a friendship developed; they are kindred spirits and Daniel helps Elisabeth think in new ways. One of the ways he does this is through art and in particular the art of Pauline Boty, a little known 1960s artist and her art is woven through the book.

The novel is well written and constructed and flits between vignettes and scenes some of which are very pertinent, some amusing, others very sad. The scenes in the post office when Elisabeth is trying to renew her passport are straight out of Monty Python. It feels very current and there are reflections on recent events and the nature of social media. This on the murder of the MP Jo Cox;

“Someone killed an MP,” she tells him. “A man shot her dead and came at her with a knife. Like shooting her wouldn’t be enough. But it’s old news now. Once it would have been a year’s worth of news. But news right now is like a flock of speeded-up sheep running off the side of a cliff.”

Elisabeth reflects that in her situation as a part time lecturer she has little hope of buying a house, very little money and no job security. She also talks about her students, “graduating with all that debt and a future in the past.” Her mother meanwhile has been on a popular TV antiques programme and has met another woman of a similar age and started a relationship. The part where Elisabeth walks in on them kissing is hilarious. The novel is powerfully propelled by the narrative voice and despite covering a broad range of topics like art, politics, feminism, literature, the nature of memory, prejudice and Brexit (of course), it is never hard to read. It is a reflection on who we are and what we are made of, As Deborah Levy says:

“Transcendental writing about art, death, political lies, trees and all the dimensions of love.”

And I love the occasional rants:

“I’m tired of the news. I’m tired of the way it makes things spectacular that aren’t, and deals so simplistically with what’s truly appalling. I’m tired of the vitriol. I’m tired of anger. I’m tired of the meanness. I’m tired of selfishness. I’m tired of how we’re doing nothing to stop it. I’m tired of how we’re encouraging it. I’m tired of the violence that’s on it’s way, that’s coming, that hasn’t happened yet. I’m tired of liars. I’m tired of sanctified liars. I’m tired of how those liars have let this happen. I’m tired of having to wonder whether they did it out of stupidity or did it on purpose. I’m tired of lying governments. I’m tired of people not caring whether they’re being lied to anymore. I’m tired of being made to feel this fearful.”

Seemita says

[A formidable 3.5]

[Originally appeared here: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/li...>]

She has done it in the past; and she does it again here. Ali Smith’s fixation on, and a visible mastery of, story-telling across timeline, in no particular order, shines in this experimental, breezy novel as well.

Centred around the 30-something Elisabeth Demand and her centenarian friend, Daniel Gluck, Autumn is a long, vibrant, occasionally melancholic, sometimes acerbic but entirely warming season of their friendship. Elisabeth, with a ‘s’, is a history of art professor, whose interest was originally kindled in the subject she currently teaches, by the liberal hours she had spent with Daniel, her then-babysitter. As a genial neighbour to Elisabeth’s busy mother, he had agreed to be her caretaker, and in turn, had relished the artistic discourse

with the little Ms. Demand. Fast forward a good twenty plus years and Daniel is now a patient in a day care, under the constant vigil of nurses and in wait of, perhaps, the same palliative cacophony of Elisabeth's inquisitive murmur.

Throwing light on the two personalities and what edification the many seasons of life imparts, the chapters run forward and backward on the tenuous thread of time. Smith shapes her Elisabeth with a smart countenance, boisterous wit, wry humour and banal gloom.

The man creases up. It seems he was joking; his shoulders go up and down but no sound comes out of him. It's like laughter, but also like a parody of laughter, and simultaneously a bit like he's having an asthma attack. May be you're not allowed to laugh out loud behind the counter of the main Post Office.

Whether it is the ridiculous bureaucratic hurdles she encounters in her efforts to secure a passport or the disdain she receives at her rebellious choice of thesising on Pauline Boty, Elisabeth comes across as a feisty heroine who is subdued by the autumnal phase of her friend and the dried momentum of her own life. Amidst random allusion to political upheavals in Europe (read Brexit) and the millennium bug, it is the generous badinage between the two key characters that bring this work to life. Velvets of sentiment and pun run through the pages, making Elisabeth's first person narrative as effective as Daniel's reticent third person narrative.

At once, hilarious, stimulating, querulous and refreshing, this is Smith's frolicking side at play, without losing the sight of her trademark percipience. Winter, I await.

[Note: Thanks to Netgalley, Ali Smith and Penguin Books (UK) for providing me an ARC.]

Adina says

I don't know. I don't know what to write about Autumn. I don't even know what I've read. What was I supposed to get from this book, what was the purpose? Was it a Brexit novel? I don't think so. It does talk some about Brexit. But it also talks about a strange friendship between a little girl (presently grown up) and an old man. Odd conversations those two had. And about a dubious Pop Artist. There were also a few weird, moderately fun, post office conversations. There were some interesting parts and some parts that I could not get, no matter how much I was frowning at the page. There were jumps from one time line to another. There were dreams, death dreams There were quotations from books. There were other stuff that I did not care for or had any idea what they meant. Something about a sexual scandal.

As you can see, I cannot write a coherent review because I did not think the book was coherent either. I get it, I appreciate the originality and all. That's why I'm giving it 3 stars. There were good parts, I even smiled once or twice but I cannot say I enjoyed the experience. Most likely, I am not the right person to read Ali Smith. Sorry I cannot do better.

To make up for it will post the visual opinion of my cat on this novel. I have the impression she enjoyed it more than I did. She thinks it tasted delicious.

I know, I know. Cat pictures for a serious book shortlisted to the Booker Prize. I don't care. The author spent

half the book writing about some strange collages of a Pop Art painter with all the details included, so I can do whatever I want with my review. It is another form of art, isn't it? ?. I've probably gone mad.

Cheri says

*"April come she will
When streams are ripe and swelled with rain
May she will stay
Resting in my arms again
June she'll change her tune
In restless walks she'll prowls the night"*
--"April Come She Will" lyrics by Paul Simon

"It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times."

Traveling back and forth through time, the past to the present, from Elisabeth's childhood and meeting her new neighbor Daniel Gluck, to the brink of the political climate that began with Brexit, this story covers a lot of territory in a rather fluid way, dealing with aging, love in its many shapes and forms, friendship, art and artists, books and the telling of stories, the concept of time, music, identity, the culture of television, politics, sexual inequality, division of people, division of countries, and global warming.

When first they meet, Elisabeth pretends to be her (non-existent) twin sister, and after a bit of a chat, Daniel says:

*"'Very pleased to meet you both. Finally.'
'How do you mean, finally?' Elisabeth said. 'We only moved here six weeks ago.'
'The lifelong friends, he said. We sometimes wait a lifetime for them.'"*

And lifelong friends is exactly what they will become, the almost-beginning of her life until his becomes dust in the wind, and somehow beyond then. He will always be a part of her, a part of how she sees the world.

They play games; he describes a picture, a collage, to her, as she closes her eyes and listens and her imagination follows every detail of his description, occasionally asking questions. A moment, an image captured so clearly in her mind that it becomes a part of her, of how she sees art, how she sees herself, how she sees the world.

Invariably, his first question when he sees her is what is she reading.

"'Always be reading something,' he said. 'Even when we're not physically reading. How else will we read the world?'"

The topics of politics, Brexit and beyond, flows in and out throughout this novel, although there is much to balance that out, and it is not Smith's sole focus. Rather, it seems to weave in and out of the other topics, lending a time and place to this story. The fleeting nature of these things that occupy of minds and hearts, that our fears take root in, the lack of comfort in knowing that they will be replaced. As shall we.

The elusive nature of time, how slow it seems to pass for children, for those awaiting something wonderful, how quickly it passes the older we get, how quickly a life passes. The seasons, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, how quickly they pass, merge one into another. The seasons of life, how quickly they pass.

"We have to hope, Daniel was saying, that the people who love us and who know us a little bit will in the end have seen us truly. In the end, not much else matters."

*"July she will fly
And give no warning to her flight
August die she must
The autumn winds blow chilly and cold
September I remember
A love once new has now grown old"*
-- "April Come She Will" lyrics by Paul Simon

Published 07 Feb 2017

Many thanks for the ARC provided by Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group / Pantheon

Hannah Greendale says

Click [here](#) to watch a video review of this book on my channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.
