The Legal and the Literary: Cultural Perspectives on Brexit

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Abstract

The essay introduces a special issue on Brexit. Instead of merely focusing on its legal implications, this issue undertakes an examination of the UK leaving the EU from a law-and-humanities perspective. The legal analysis is therefore complemented by a broader assessment of the social and cultural features of Brexit, also extending over the complexity of the present and the incertitude posed by its future. Brexit is also a matter of reimagination; constitutional and literary issues thus coalesce towards a transdisciplinary dialogue. To this extent, the collected essays engage with Brexlit, i.e. novels and essays, political pamphlets, and other writings prompted by Brexit. The aim is to explore the doubts, fears, and threats that still haunt the UK after leaving the EU, paying particular attention to the development of new narrative strategies and forms capable of reflecting and giving expression to the new Brexit identities.

Keywords Brexit · Law and Literature · BrexLit · Borders · Immigration · Populism · Identity

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Another Focus on Brexit?

Readers and scholars may legitimately ask themselves this question when surfing the current issue of the *Liverpool Law Review*. We all know that the topic has ignited a debate going above and beyond the limits marked by our academic speculations. Slogans such as 'Take back control', 'Get Brexit done', and 'We send the EU £350 million a week – let's fund our NHS instead' testify to the impact Brexit has had on the public sphere, putting under stress the bonds of the British political community. Slogans like these were cunningly drafted to gain the consensus of the British electorate, which had distrusted the UK political class and institutions for decades. The way Brexit was made is nothing more than a variant of 'populism … and feeds on this distrust'[1]. At the same time, the act of leaving the EU is a 'major constitutional change', as the UK Supreme Court stated in its seminal *Miller* judgement in 2017.[2] Therefore, Brexit was (and still is) styled as a real 'constitutional moment'.[3] For the sake of accuracy, it is one of those constitutional moments that happen once in lifetime.

In Spring 2023, though, the echoes of the often harsh and divisive social, legal, cultural, and political debates surrounding it seem to have faded away. Gone are the days of the protracted parliamentary debates that made it necessary to amend the statutory definition of 'exit day' three times to avoid crashing out of the EU in a hard-Brexit mood. The *European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020* allowed 'exit day' to eventually enter British constitutional reality on January 31st, 2020. Gone were also the days when the UK-EU relations had been 'fractious and difficult', as the then PM Boris Johnson put it. According to him, the 2020 EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) inaugurated a new era of friendship and mutual trust: 'We will be your friend, your ally, your supporter and your number one market', he declared when announcing the TCA on Christmas Eve of 2020.[4] With its proposed amendments to the Northern Ireland Protocol, the 2023 'Windsor Framework' put the finishing touches on the renewed EU-UK relationship. And the House of Lords' amendments to the most contentious parts of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill seem to have boosted these relationships on either side of the Channel.[5]

So, 'Why a New Focus on Brexit'?

Among the many reasons that may be given, Giuseppe Martinico observes that one is related to being 'Brexit … also a landmark event in the characterisation of the relationship between the EU and its Member States'. 'Even after Brexit', he acutely

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[1] Martinico (2023a), … and (2021) for a broader assessment on how populism impacts on constitutional law.

[2] *R (on the application of Miller and another) (Respondents) v. Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Appellant)* [2017] UKSC 5, at 81, 100, and 171.

[3] On Brexit as a 'constitutional moment' see Bogdanor (2019), 257–278.

[4] Butterworth (2020).

[5] For more on these topics see Ward (2023a, b); Nicolini (2023).

pinpoints, 'the inextricable knot that the membership created will not vanish magically in one blow'. From the standpoint of the continentals, its 'legacy … is destined to last beyond the individual case of the UK', thus triggering manifold constitutional issues as regards the EU composite legal order.[6] What we understand is that 'Brexit is impossible to attain by listening only to British voices', Silvia Pellicer-Ortín correctly argues; consequently, its assessment should indeed 'include the numerous agents configuring the post-Brexit scenario'.[7] In our opinion, indeed, both the UK and the EU need 'new narrative forms capable of reflecting' their often conflicting, albeit complementary, new emerging Brexit identities. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that the 'inextricable knot' encompassing the UK-EU-Member States relations will continue to be part of what Laura A Zander and Nicola Kramp-Seidel term the *transdisciplinary voices in conversation* about the past, present, and future of the very idea of Europe.[8]

There is a further reason that justifies our research on Brexit. A few lines above we have labelled it as a constitutional moment that happens once in lifetime. That *usually* happens, we must add, once in lifetime. The last three years have been 'a stage … turbulent and troublesome'.[9] Our societies have constantly been challenged by once-in-a-lifetime events. Together with Brexit, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the death of Elizabeth II, and the Coronation of Charles III are (often non-legal) factors that have undermined the conventional forms through which the British have traditionally conceived of themselves.

Has the time come for reimaging Britain? Well, in a way, it has. Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has dedicated a book to *Reimagining Britain*: 'The British vision for our diversity and for human flourishing requires … wide-leadership and imagination' to knit together 'the context of our past, the threats and difficulties of the present, and … faithfulness to our future'.[10] It is not only a matter of EU-UK relations; the very identity of Britain is at stake, as a global actor and in its relations with its former Empire and the rest of the world.[11] It is also a process of reimagination that encompasses the British people and the way they conceive of (and write) their own Constitution, also extending over the complexity of the present and the incertitude posed by its future. All these relations, we assume, are a matter of identities, which constantly interact with the broader social, political, and cultural scenario.

The reasons are therefore legal, social, cultural, and geographical. On the one hand, as Robert Tombs puts it, Britain has traditional located itself 'in and out of Europe', both politically and imaginatively. *Politically*, its joining the European Bloc was made up of several opting outs: from the Schengen acquis, from the Economic and Monetary Union, from the area of freedoms, security and justice, and from the Charter of Fundamental Rights.[12]*Imaginatively*, the UK is not 'bound by

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[6] Martinico (2023), 197.

[7] Pellicer-Ortín (2023), ….

[8] Zander and Kramp-Seidel (2023).

[9] Ward (2020), 53.

[10] Welby (2018) 10.

[11] Stuart Ward (2023a, b), especially Parts I and III.

[12] Tombs (2022) 35–59, terms these opting outs UK's 'second thoughts'.

land to other countries', which makes it 'particular in its ability to imagine itself … precisely because it is an island, and its status as an island, surrounded and enclosed by water, corresponds metaphorically with the medieval *hortus conclusus*.[13] Set, as it is, 'in a Silver sea', the island – Silvia Pellicer-Ortín reminds us – 'has never been invaded'.[14] Brexit is therefore a redolent narrative of nostalgia, an inward-looking journey through its inner self.

The Journey: Brexit Between Law and Humanities

When we decided to undertake this research on Brexit, we understood that the inextricable knot of relations and identities could not be governed only by technicalities. A good dose of reimagination was required.

What we proposed to our colleagues joining the project was to tour the island. To be honest, all the essay collected in this special issue mainly revolve around the condition of England. We all know that the decision to leave the EU was mainly English – and, partly, Welsh. Indeed, 'the hard-Brexit approach substantiates', as Matteo Nicolini clarifies in his essay, 'the Anglo-British vision of an alternative destination' of the British Isles 'out of Europe'.[15] To put it differently, 'Brexit was made in England'.[16] In geographical terms, this meant undertaking 'a Journey in search of a country and its people', as Stuart Maconie writes in his compelling revisitation of Priestley's *English Journey* (1934), which is a 'key text in understanding England'.[17]

Our touring the country required additional efforts, because it meant also touring – metaphorically, at least – the 'tangled complexity' of the UK leaving the EU through a variety of novels that imagined new British identities.

Within the 'ongoing conversation Britain is continuing to have with itself', we suggested our colleagues to read, mark, and digest novels and essays, political pamphlets, and other writings prompted by Brexit to explore the 'existing cultural imaginaries and patriotic attachments' that still haunt the UK after leaving the EU.[18]

Brexit has indeed generated a vast body of literature, also called *BrexLit*, which addresses the divides and the many pre-existing divisions that Brexit has revealed in all their complexity. As Silvia Pellicer-Ortín argues, 'some of these works establish an antagonistic Leave or Remain dichotomy, … but perhaps not necessarily productive in terms of reducing the divisions in society or even generating compassion for the opposition'.[19] Books such as Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016), Grant's *A Stranger City* (2019), Coe's *Middle England* (2018), McEwan's *The Cockroach* (2019), and Craig's *The Lie of the Land* (2017) – to quote just a few – are located in a Brexit scenario. Yet, all these novels engage in a dialogue with Britain's history, literary past and current

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[13] Tombs (2022) and Tigner (2012), 2.

[14] Pellicer-Ortín (2023), ….

[15] Nicolini (2023), ….

[16] Henderson et al. (2017), 632.

[17] Maconie (2023), 4.

[18] Shaw (2021), 3. On Brexit literature see Everitt (2021).

[19] Pellicer-Ortín (2023), ….

popular culture. This is, on its own, another area where the technicalities of Brexit were challenged and revised.

This was indeed the background within which contributors were invited to explore one or more features of the multifaceted Brexit conundrum, as well as to tour the various fields indicated above.

Narrative and Identity

The social and political events of the twentieth and twenty-first century have affected our perceptions of Europe. Its universalising idea has undergone multiple processes of fragmentation and reconstitution, determining new imaginaries and symbolical values. The Europe of Brexit is rooted in the key concept of borders as a liminal space oscillating between a geopolitical meaning and a threshold one, with its implication of passage and union. Usually intended as markers of national sovereignty and identity, borders do not simply imply processes of exclusion, but 'produce differentiation and stratification of legal [and cultural] statuses and subjectivities'.[20] They are cultural markers, 'scaped'[21], and as such they are open to recontextualization, as well as transgressions. They are accompanied by national narratives, rooted in specific cultures, which form an imagined community, a social construct people identify with and which shapes their collective identity.[22] Brexit aimed to counterpose a 'EU concept' intended as a common narrative against a fractured Europe; as Laura A Zander points out in her contribution to the present focus, this has implicitly defined EU borders as 'Fortress Europe', rejecting attempts at border crossings. Brexit therefore acted as a looking glass, rooting itself in a concept of b/orders[23], explicitly rejecting experiences of movement and cultural encounters that can reshape ideas of the nation and offering an ethnocentric perspective which counterposed Britain to Europe. In this way, Europe is 'othered' and the British self is defined in opposition to it, thus rejecting a relational conception of borders which has characterised the twenty-first century globalised world.[24]

As Jeanne Gaakeer asserts, 'Law is fond of boundaries'.[25] These 'borderscapes' embody specific cultural narratives which support and ground the territorial spatiality of the nation state.[26] As a matter of fact, they represent liminal zones that interrogate their underlying concept of division and the related oppositional conception of the citizen self. As Rosello and Wolfe observe, borders are an institution but also a process, as they are at the same time constituted both by society's 'grand narratives [of border formation] and performative ... narratives of border crossing'.[27] Borders acquire an ontological dimen-

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[20] Andrijasevic (2009), 398.

[21] Korte and Lojo-Rodriguez (2017), 9. See also Gardini, Jacobs and Morgan (2017).

[22] Anderson (1983).

[23] Schimanski and Wolfe (2017), 149.

[24] See Brambilla (2015).

[25] Gaakeer (2013), 15.

[26] See Schimanski and Wolfe (2017), 7, Appadurai (1990), Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007), xi-xii.

[27] Rosello and Wolfe (2017), 12.

sion as both their crossing or acceptance leads to an exploration of the self and a confrontation with Otherness, in a 'performative negotiatio[n] of nations and their narration'.[28] As Christine Berberich points out, '[l]iterature … assumes a mythopoeic function as it helps create and perpetuate myths old and new alike', and contributes to specific 'notion[s] of community, belonging and (national) identity'.[29] Europe's imaginaries are written and re-written according to the ongoing social and political changes. Literary works contribute to the imaginary of the nation; the novel itself has developed parallel to European nationalism[30] and it is now developing rearticulating different narrative strategies and genres to respond to the new Brexit scenarios and the current sociocultural changes by presenting a 'cosmopolitan engagement' vs a nationalistic perspective. BrexLit challenges 'monolithic constructions of national identity'[31] also by challenging and crossing literary borders.

As Matteo Nicolini asserts in his contribution to the present focus, Brexit started a time of crisis and political uncertainty which has triggered jurisgenerative processes, acts of reappropriation and reinterpretation of inherited legal knowledge. As a matter of fact, 'Law participates in the production of meanings within the shared semiotic system of a culture, but it is also a product of that culture and the practices that reproduce it'.[32] In line with this, Brexit has affected the political, legal and cultural concepts of the British constitution; the law strives to 'reimagine', that is, 'to renew existing legal frameworks and reinvigorate their relevance in the light of broader political and cultural change'.[33] In the same way, literature strives to 'reimagine' the individual self in this new social and political context. In line with the Anglo-Saxon conception of the law, imagination becomes a 'cultural competence' in legal practice[34] and also in a law and humanities approach.

The idea of fragmentation introduced by Brexit also involves its narrative forms, which engage with the psychogeographical idea of borders and the possibilities for their transgression. This creates a polyphony and palimpsestic perspective which challenges national identities, as Silvia Pellicer-Ortín points out in her contribution to the present focus centred on the figure of the immigrant. On the same line, Zander reflects on BrexLit's strategies for erasing borders through the EFACIS Kaleidoscope series, thus named because of the kaleidoscope's ability to introduce surprising configurations.[35] Such characteristic is rendered through a narrative structure that takes shape depending on the order of the reading of the stories; as Zander points out, 'The reading of a single new contribution can change one's view of others already familiar and vice versa',[36] thus offering the reader the possibility for an active critical reflection and the experience of the liminal border of the self. The potential of the short

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[28] Rosello and Wolfe (2017), 12.

[29] Berberich (2015).

[30] Anderson (1983).

[31] Shaw (2021), 3.

[32] Mezey (2001), 47.

[33] Bennett, Mickiewicz, Nicolini, Mullender (2020), 5.

[34] Bennett, Mickiewicz, Nicolini, Mullender (2020), 4.

[35] Zander 2023 focus p.

[36] Zander 2023, focus p.

story to cross borders in the act of reading[37] is further empowered by the networked structure of the project and confirms its effect to grant the acquisition of a narrative language, although still suspended within the borders of 'the hostile language of immigration law'.[38]

The fact that nationalism is based on processes of Othering has led also to a reinterpretation of the Gothic genre, itself characterised by the attention to spatial control and the threat of reverse colonisation, as Brexit Gothic. As Ilott points out, 'Expulsion and abjection of the Other as a response to fears of literal invasion or challenges to national identity are central to the Gothic and its relationship to Englishness more broadly'.[39] Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has been considered anticipatory of the current political and social issues with its fears of 'dissolution of the nation, of society, of the human subject'[40] and the tracing of Europe as a space of alterity/otherness. The threat of diasporic movements from the colonies and the neighbouring countries in the nineteenth century endangered the stability of the nation state and became embodied by a geopolitical enemy stigmatised as a primitive force, a vampire, that attacks the English centuries-long tradition of domination and needs to be contained through a strengthening of borders (concrete and metaphorical in the novel's plot). Actually, the vampire is a foreign body that uncannily threatens the culturally established self and the boundary between self and other.[41] 'By problematizing the boundaries [of the English empire]', Arata observed, 'Stoker probes the heart of culture's sense of itself, its ways of defining and distinguishing itself from other peoples, other cultures, in its hour of perceived decline'.[42] This unsettling of the notions of boundaries is addressed also by novels which anticipate BrexLit, such as Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* (2009), where a guesthouse actually tortures and expels foreign non-white workers and has been considered as an uncanny anticipation of contemporary immigration detention centres. The gothic tenets are employed to demarcate the boundaries that enclose law within its sovereign terrain, thus bestowing upon it an idea of purity.[43]

As Sbiri, Nyman, Yassine point out, 'the borderscape has also been represented as a Gothic space of death, a zombie border',[44] where the identity of the migrant remains suspended, while instead it can lead to the exploration and acquisition of new identities in an analogous way to the establishment of the Gothic genre itself. As Chaplin observes, 'on the borders of canonically marginalized works are found narratives of origin and statements of authorial intent designed to secure for the text a legitimate literary heritage'.[45]

Moreover, the gothic sense of confinement into a stifling political context, a psychomachia of the protagonist which is embodied usually by the castle can be con-

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[37] Shaw (2019), 55.

[38] Shaw (2019), 55.

[39] Ilott (2018), ch 11.

[40] Byron (2012), 133.

[41] Battisti (2014), 119–120, and Halberstam (2000), 17.

[42] Arata (1990), 626–627. See also Fiorato (2021).

[43] Douzinas, Warrington, McVeigh (1991), 25, quoted in Delaney (2003), 70.

[44] Sbiri et al. (2020), 7.

[45] Chaplin (2005), 48–49.

nected to the "retrotopia" Brexit revolves around, that is, in Bauman's terms, the vision of a glorious past that does not seem to be "tied to the […] future"[46], while narratives of identity "nee[d] to start in the past and pace [their] way to a future that embraces and resolves the discrepancies between past and present."[47] Brexit seemingly tries to restore an idyllic ideal of the past and for this reason seems to mirror Boym's definition of nostalgia (quoted by Bauman) as "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but […] also a romance with one's own fantasy."[48] The first part of the definition refers to the lack of a politically dominant position for Great Britain akin to the time of the English Empire. The cultural nation represented by Brexit thus becomes the state nation, in the context of an identity crisis that underlines its insularity more than the relationship with the EU upon which it is based. As Eaglestone asserts, "Britain has never really felt European, nor has the European Union stimulated the public imagination in the same manner as the Commonwealth or Empire"[49] which resurged through Brexit. Nostalgia implies the sharing of a collective memory and an emotional bonding dangerously confusing the imaginary vision with the real one, a return to national symbols and myths at the basis of resurgent nationalistic movements.[50] As Elber Aviram observes, British self-image revolved around the counterposition between Britain's "liberty and civility and the violence and domination that were the realities of Empire"[51].

Post Brexit scenarios are addressed also by science fiction, in line with the view of Brexit as "a dystopic, never-ending 'season' of disorientation, disconnection and division."[52] The genre is characterised by a focus on "our own conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective"[53] which stages the encounter with the Other and with difference. As Elber Aviram observes, science fiction can offer progressive alternatives to the binary logic of Brexit, which counterposes England and an imagined "European Other" and which can be considered "exemplar of the ways in which the avowed fictitiousness of the worlds of science fiction calls attention to the obfuscated fictitiousness of nation-states and the borders that define them."[54] An example in this sense is represented by David Hutchinson's Fractured Europe Quartet. In particular, the first novel of the series, *Europe in Autumn* (2014), introduces a context where independence referenda have led to a Europe fragmented into miriads of statelets.[55] The second novel, *Europe at Midnight* (2015) introduces the referendum for the UK withdrawal from the European Union, while the third novel, *Europe in Winter* (2016) presents the changes determined by the Brexit Referendum in the body politic of Europe which may lead to the breakup of the United Kingdom. The

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[46] See Bauman (2017).

[47] Fludernik (2003), xxviii-xxix.

[48] Boym (2001), xiii, quoted in Bauman (2017), 3.

[49] Eaglestone. See also Shaw (2018).

[50] Bauman (2017), 2.

[51] Elber Aviram (2021), 45.

[52] Byrne (2020), 84.

[53] Parrinder (2001), 4.

[54] See Elber-Aviram (2021), 6.

[55] Kincaid (2017).

last novel of the quartet, *Europe at Dawn* (2018), shows the creation of concentration camps for refugees. In this dystopian scenario, the first novel, *Autumn*, introduces an alternative world which comes into existence in a parallel dimension through a computer cartography software. A map identifies the seat of the so-called Community, which creates a simulacrum of England based on the nineteenth century features of the country in an alternative dimension. As we read in the text,

> Everyone in the Community was English. From one end of the Continent to the other. There were only English things here. There were no other languages, only regional dialects. No other cuisines but English. No other clothing styles but English. No other architectural styles but English. It was awful.[56]

Also children's literature has engaged in the representation of the new Brexit scenario, in particular by rewriting works set in an idealized British past, such as Bruno Vincent's renditions of Enid Blyton's Famour Five series of the 1950s, which have been addressed by Sidia Fiorato and Susan Honeyman in the present focus. Vincent transforms Kirrin island, the seat of the children's adventures of the original texts into a symbolical reaction against Brexit by having the protagonists engage in a process of independence from Brexit UK, thus inverting the current political perspective. The text depicts dystopic scenarios and a journey into the self that leads the young readers to reflect upon the meaning of social community. Moreover, Lucien Young's/Leavis Carroll's *Alice in Brexitland* (2017) presents the conception of the new political scenario as a journey into a still fantastic world the young protagonist tries to interpret and 'make sense' of.[57] As Wyen asserts, 'The parodies function as humorous coping mechanisms for a Brexit reality, but they also expose how the nostalgia associated with the charm of the originals becomes a political and social commentary for the 2016 Brexit campaign'.[58]

Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016) is considered as the first post-Brexit novel and brings our reflections full circle. It traces the atmosphere that led to the 2016 referendum and its description of the aftermath of the referendum's results is still applicable to the contemporary context;

> All across the country, there was misery and rejoicing […] 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 looked up Google: what is EU?' […] All across the country, people said it wasn't that they didn't like immigrants. All across the country, people said it was about control.[59]

The narrative addresses the question of borders with a concrete fence the protagonist's mother attacks by throwing objects symbolical of people's histories, in a metaphorical attempt at entering the liminal space through individual experience that asks

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[56] Hutchinson (2015), 242,

[57] Fiorato (2023, b).

[58] Wiyen (2021), 145.

[59] Smith 2016, pp. 60–61.

for visibility. Zander defines Smith's Seasonal Quartet as a kind of bridging fiction[60] over the ontological as well as the cultural chasm caused by Brexit. The work creates a liminal aesthetics engaging with 'a dialectic between political borders and aesthetic orders'[61] which highlights the connective potential of books.

Navigating Brexit. Issues and Essays

The focus begins with a real journey. We have already mentioned Maconie's and Prestley's journeys. Yet, the idea of touring the island (and England, more specifically) has ancient roots. In 1771, for example, Tobias Smollet published his *The Expedition oh Humphry Clinker*, which provides a choral description of England and Scotland through letters written by the characters of the book. In *A Tour Through Brexit Britain*, Ian Ward embarks on a different tour, namely of Brexit Britain in the company of the eighteenth-century writer Daniel Defoe, whose *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* was published between 1724 and 1726. As Ward explains, Defoe's *Tour* is a kind of a gentleman's guide to the newly 'United' Kingdom of Great Britain. In revisiting Defoe's *Tour*, Ward tests the integrity of this same union three centuries on through Britain's tortured attempt to extricate itself from another Union, the European.

Matteo Nicolini embarks on a similar tour. In his *'A symptom of an underlying condition'. Law and literature as a non-formalistic approach to Brexit*, the tortured attempt to leave the EU is addressed as a constitutional and jurisgenerative moment. Nicolini's reading of the UK leaving the EU departs from that traditionally used to assess its impact on the Anglo-British constitution. Politics and legalism – he argues – have trapped Britain in a formalistic approach without offering innovative responses to the challenges posed by Brexit, persuading the public that there are no alternatives to an out-of-Europe approach. Brexit requires less formalism and more attentiveness to its impact on British society. It is indeed pivotal to examine Brexit though the conditions underlying it, if we want to nurture the productive imagination needed to support Britain's constitutional creativity during the post-Brexit scenario.

The tour through the UK's inner self is also explored in Zander's *Unwriting Brexit? Bridging Fictions and Liminal Aesthetics within the UK's Hostile Environment.* In her opinion, Brexit is the embedment of the various frictions and fissures in contemporary European politics, which often aims at division rather than community. Brexit has revitalised the idea of Borders; as Zander explains, their creation, reinforcement, and protection seem to be a core aim of both the EU foreign policy with its related narrative of the 'fortress Europe', and the UK Hostile Environment policy. Yet, there is still a body of literature that aims at the erasure of borders, that seeks to bridge the existing ruptures within society and to reconcile the divided camps. Zander explores two literary projects: the EFACIS Kaleidoscope series which features various writers and artists from Ireland and their respective views on Europe; and Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet and *Companion Piece*, five novels that negotiate contemporary UK

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[60] See Zander (2021), 287–308.

[61] Nail (2020), 5, qtd. in Zander (2023b), focus p. ….

politics post Brexit. In this respect, both projects seem particularly suited to create a welcoming climate of solidarity, in order to unwrite, if not Brexit itself, at least some of its consequences.

The fractious outcomes of Brexit are at the heart of Silvia Pellicer-Ortín's *Fragmentation and Relationality in Brexit Narratives: Linda Grant's* A Stranger City. Pellicer assumes that Linda Grant's *A Stranger City* is particularly illustrative of BrexLit. Unlike the majority of BrexLit novels, *A Stranger City* relinquishes the British perspective as it is concerned with the manifold experiences of various European citizens set in London against a background of xenophobia, nationalism and political tensions. *A Stranger City* also shows some narrative devices that characterise those newest fictions defined as fragmented narratives and networked novels to identify the tensions between fragmentation and relationality that have been visible at a political and social level in the wake of Brexit. In her opinion, this aspect seems to evoke a hopeful future in which the fragmented identities of post-Brexit Europeans have the possibility to flow in a more connected way than ever before. Division than populates Giuseppe Martinico's *The Lie of the Land: A Critical Legal Analysis by Amanda Craig*. Although the book never explicitly mentions the topic of Brexit, it is an excellent description of the country's division after the referendum of 23 June 2016, depicting a country threatened by populist tensions and sovereignism.

Last but not least, Sidia Fiorato and Susan Honeyman explore the way Brexit might frame the future, also shaping the imaginary of future generations. In *Children's Literature and National Consciousness: Bruno Vincent's* Five on Brexit Island (2016) *and* Five Escape Brexit Island (2017), *Text by Enid Blyton*, they explore Anderson's imagined communities and its related process of storytelling, as well as the sharing of grounding myths and narratives for the creation of the symbolic space of the nation. Children's literature focuses on the process of identity formation of its young readers and for this reason it has always been connected with models of social behaviour. By imaginatively engaging with the proposed narratives, the child experiences society's and the nation's embodied practices. Fiorato and Honeyman's tour leads us to England, whose pastoral idyll mirrors a national identity rooted in its rural landscape and lifestyle. This rural imaginary usually associated to the South of England was exploited – or 'harvested', as Nicolini puts it in his essay – by Brexit supporters as embodying England's original and independent identity. However, their essay also points to the instances of resistance to accepted worldviews through unconventional characters who foster a critical perspective on the issues at the centre of the narrative. The re-reading of Enid Blyton's successful Famous Five series of the 1950s by Bruno Vincent focuses on Brexit's narrative space to reflect upon the changes we are witnessing in our contemporary society and try to understand their socio-cultural, economic, and political implications.

As is evident, our tour of Brexit is a pendulum swinging back and forth, between nostalgic images of Englishness and the idealisation of this past as projected into the future and reimagined through Brexlit. It is, then, a tour taking us also on either side of the Channel. Interestingly, this has become a place of encounter, where, as Phil Hubbard explains, identity and belonging are forged at the 'edge of England' and mainland Europe.[62]

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[62] Hubbard (2022).

No wonder, therefore, if Charlie Connelly has entitled his recent book *The Channel* – not The *English* Channel.[63] With no adjectives. Our collection also aims to explore the topic navigating the Channel following alternative (and perhaps unchartered) stretches of open waters. This choice, in our ambition, might indeed disclose new avenues whereby UK and EU identities may meet, soon or later, again.

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