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"Solace for [the] very soul": The Role of Trees within the American Short-Story Cycle

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“SOLACE FOR [THE] VERY SOUL”: THE ROLE OF TREES WITHIN THE AMERICAN
SHORT-STORY CYCLE

by

BREANNA B. HARRIS

(Under the direction of Olivia Carr Edenfield)

ABSTRACT

Over the last couple of centuries, the American short-story genre became characterized by its observations of life and human nature—specifically by using scenes of nature to highlight characters’ development and the underlying theme. While much critical attention has been given to the role of nature in the American short-story cycle, very little consideration has been given to the purpose of trees and their specific breeds within the genre. This project focuses on three distinct pedagogical approaches to analyzing trees in three short-story cycles. Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome and Freud’s theory of dream-thoughts are applied to Mary Wilkins Freeman’s *Six Trees* (1903) to understand the significance of the distinct breeds. A close reading of the interactions of only three characters—George Willard, Elizabeth Willard, and Doctor Reefy—with trees is employed for Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), which suggests the ultimate success or failure of each character’s relationships. The analysis of Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time* (1930) is further narrowed by examining only the character of Nick Adams and how the woods as a collective provide solace, while the specific breeds reveal his inner struggles and true feelings.

INDEX WORDS: Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, Mary Wilkins Freeman, American short-story cycle, Trees, Nature, Internalization, *Winesburg, Ohio*, *In Our Time*, *Six Trees*

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CHAPTER 1

“SOLACE FOR [THE] VERY SOUL”: THE ROLE OF TREES WITHIN THE AMERICAN SHORT-STORY CYCLE

INTRODUCTION

The American short-story cycle has long been neglected by not only American scholars, but critics across the world. Though the short-story cycle contains many identifying characteristics that are entirely its own, for centuries the cycle has struggled to gain the acceptance it merits as its own genre, distinct from the novel. This struggle to gain individual recognition is largely due to the breadth of the novel's genre, which is characterized simply by a fictitious, narrative plot. Jennifer L. Smith affirms the complexities of the novel, affirming that histories of the genre “have long revealed the incredible diversity of the origins for, manifestations of, and experimentations with the novel” (4). Because of the diverse forms of the novel, critics debate about how clearly to define what does and does not fall under the genre of the novel, especially the short-story cycle. Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris, authors of *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition*, allege the short-story cycle is, in fact, a composite novel; Robert M. Luscher, writer of *The American Short-Story Cycle: Out from the Novel's Shadow*, however, confirms the cycle is more than a novel as “the sequence invites the singularity of the story, the diversity of the novel, and the harmony and distillation of lyric poetry” (Smith 2).ⁱ As countless short-story cycles were clumped into the novel genre, the cycle received little critical attention from critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Only in recent generations has there been a move explicitly to define the American short-story cycle and those characteristics which set it apart from all other genres.

A general history of the short story confirms the significance of the American short-story cycle and outlines the ways in which it is distinct. As inhabitants of a new country, the American people began to search for their own sense of identity separate from Great Britain. Danforth Ross

confirms this desire, asserting that in the beginning, “American literature tended to express a hybrid European character, not surprisingly, for American writers were after all primarily a product of European influences. Their problem lay in finding a way to express American character while at the same time remaining true to their European heritage” (5). American authors now had the task of crafting a genre that strengthened feelings of nationalism among its citizens for their new, independent country. Though the short story has its origins in Europe, the genre became something uniquely American over the course of more than two centuries as some of its most significant authors created works of literature that reflected the inclinations of the American people.

While the short story is the product of other legends, tales, and myths, the genre is distinctly American, as supported by Alfred Bendixen. Bendixen acknowledges that many works influenced the creation of the short story, but in “these works setting is rarely more than the listing of a place or type of scene; characterization consists largely of ascribing a few virtues or vices and perhaps a couple of physical details to the primary figures; plot development is generally either very straightforward or very clumsy, culminating in a conclusion that is usually either overtly moral or sentimental” (3). The first American short-story author to appear, thus starting the tradition, is Washington Irving, who wrote notable tales such as “Rip Van Winkle” (1819) and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820). Although Irving was an American author, the majority of his stories take inspiration from the literatures of European countries, especially Germany. By crafting stories that are inspired by other cultures and feature Americans, Irving creates a history and tradition for America that looks back at other cultural histories. Ross discusses Irving’s unique approach to his works: “In both these stories Irving goes to German legends for his ideas. Yet instead of presenting German stories in American dress, he adapts the

legends to the American scene and comes up with characters who are unmistakably American” (6). Irving took inspiration from the stories and tales of other cultures and revolutionized them, which helped shape an identity for America by giving rise to the creation of, as Bendixen asserts, “arguably the most important literary genre to have emerged in the United States” (3).

Fred Lewis Pattee details Irving’s impact on the popularity of the short story after the publication of his cycle *The Sketch Book*: “sketches and tales became the literary fashion in America, and in such volume did they come that vehicles for their dissemination became imperative. The annual, the gift book, and lady’s books like Godey’s and Graham’s, and the various popular magazines that sprang up in the ’thirties and ’forties—nurseries for the short story—were thus indirectly the fruit of Irving’s success” (20-21). The true genius of American short-story authors is in their ability to create stories that reflect the inherent zeitgeist of the country, while also catering to the needs of their audience. These writers attempted to answer what it means to be American and in doing so, formed an identity for the country that highlights its inhabitants’ perseverance in the face of hardships. In Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” (1819), Rip Van Winkle falls asleep in the woods for twenty years and sleeps through the American Revolution. When he wakes up, Rip, according to Bendixen, “momentarily loses his sense of identity, but ultimately recovers it, or perhaps more accurately, recreates it by finding a role in this strange new world as storyteller” (5). Rip shows persistence to live each day as he desires, refusing to do the work he is supposed to do in favor of assisting neighbors with their manual tasks. Eventually, his persistence is rewarded after his twenty-year sleep and he is able to manifest his new identity as a man who creates a history for the community through his tales and myths.

Nathaniel Hawthorne additionally helped shape the country's developing identity by contributing to a history for America through his writing, especially his short story "Young Goodman Brown" (1835). Steven Olsen argues Hawthorne's story functions as an "allegorical history of America which takes as its subject, in large part, an examination of the incipient American mind-set which begins to shape an American identity" (31). Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) lends to the creation of a history for the United States through the story's dilapidated edifice, which imagines a past for the country. Over time, Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, and their contemporaries produced works of literature that not only pioneered a sense of identity for the American people but evolved the short-story to meet the needs of the population as the country progressed.

As America moved out of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the Industrial Revolution sparked a boom in manufacturing that revitalized the country's economy and produced a change in the needs of the American people. Because of the Industrial Revolution, thousands of factory jobs opened across the United States, which put more citizens to work than ever before. As a result of this newfound growth in the workforce, newspapers, journals, and periodical publications escalated. John Seelye analyzes the connection between the period's technological advances, such as the steam-propelled riverboat and the cotton-gin, and the rise in popularity of the short story amongst Americans: "The story's brevity was suited to a reader perpetually short of time, who desired the speed of communications and production that characterized the inventions of Fulton and Whitney" (16). Many influential writers gained fame by publishing short stories in American magazines, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville. Before this economic upswing, there was less of a desire for literary publications, but now workers yearned for something that could engage them on their commutes,

work breaks, etc., which inspired many authors to begin writing for publication in newspapers. Seeley confirms this increased desire for short fiction: “Short stories in periodicals in America seem to have been primarily written for readers on the run, so to speak, contrasting with the three-decker novels then in vogue, most of which were imported from Great Britain, where the short story did not flourish until much later in the century” (16). The short story becomes a uniquely American genre early on—not only because its authors wanted to recreate the spirit of the country’s people, but also because its form was developed and adapted to the changing needs of the American people.

As the country evolved over time, each of America’s many different regions developed their own unique cultures, customs, and dialects. Many short stories sought to showcase the distinctiveness of the country’s many regions after the division that resulted from the Civil War, which occasioned the rise of Realism. In *Anthology of the American Short Story*, James Nagel argues that Realism “presented an honest portrait of everyday life for common people, and its conflicts grew from the problems Americans faced for themselves and their families. The narrators were often ordinary characters speaking a regional dialect, and the themes were familiar issues to the majority of citizens” (309). In Realist works, great emphasis is placed on setting because the country was still being explored and settled by the American people. While the surrounding, undeveloped landscape was always a potential threat, Realist authors focused on the positive, sublime nature that was untouched by man.

Nature plays a dominant role in the most notable American short stories to arise during the period of Realism, including Mark Twain’s “Celebrated Jumping Frog” (1865), Sarah Orne Jewett’s “A White Heron” (1886), and Hamlin Garland’s “The Return of a Private” (1891), but nature was not the sole focus of these authors. Many of the works that came out of this period

sought to bring solace and to unify the American people by showing individuals of varying genders, races, environments, and financial situations struggling with issues of everyday life that most citizens can empathize with. Authors produced works that focused on the issues shared by many citizens, offering solace and promoting a stronger sense of community among Americans as they struggled to restore and reunite the country in the aftermath of the Civil War. Authors of Realist works focused on presenting life as it truly was, and by focusing on the actuality of American life, they further produced a sense of identity and solace for the ever-evolving America.

With their emphasis on verisimilitude, American authors also brought attention to the cultures and environments of the different regions of the country, leading to a subset of Realist literature termed Local Colorism. Local Color fiction focuses on creating accurate depictions of regional settings, which, as Nagel explains, “brought a localized richness to literature, subordinating plot to setting and regional character; it also captured local dialects, perhaps the most energizing aspect of the movement” (310). These two genres fostered countless works of fiction that portrayed accurate depictions of regions around the United States, exposing the average reader to areas of the country they likely knew little to nothing about. Mary Wilkins Freeman employs Local Color in much of her writing, including one of her most anthologized works, “The Revolt of Mother” (1891), which follows a New England farming family and gives an accurate depiction of the expectations for men and women of this area at this time. Emphasizing the cultures of various regions across the country, these Realistic works helped cultivate America’s new sense of identity and celebrated the unique qualities of these settings, at the same time that it encouraged unity amongst the American people.

Less than a century after the rise of Realism and Local Color, Modernism takes hold in

the United States. Modernism shares many similar characteristics with previous literary movements but focuses much more on the isolated individual and the struggles of the human condition. Nagel writes that in Modernism, most “stories did not employ an omniscient narrator but an individualized point of view, using first person or third-person limited focused on the protagonist. The plots presumed free will for the characters, who thus took responsibility for the decisions they made. As a result, ethical dilemmas, expressed as internal struggles, became a central plot device” (556). In many Modernist works, the protagonists are struggling with personal, psychological issues that are not always immediately revealed to the reader. However, as in Realism, great emphasis is placed on landscape and nature but in Modernism, nature in general, as well as an individual’s interactions with nature often reveal deeper information about the character. A prime example of this role of nature appears in Jesse Stuart’s “The Split Cherry Tree (1939), in which the main character, Dave Sexton, accidentally destroys a cherry tree, symbolizing his struggle to mediate between the old, uneducated way of life his father, Luster, lives and his own commitment to receiving an education. Modernist literature considers the internal struggles of individuals, while keeping the most important aspects of a story lie beneath the surface, requiring readers to give attention to every detail given.

As a result of nineteenth-century America’s escalated desire for short, accessible works, more short stories were published in newspapers and journals than ever before. Pattee argues that because of the overwhelming number of people writing short fiction, “the papers and magazines of the period could publish only a fraction of what the new group was eager to produce” (28). In response to this change in public opinion, publishers began collecting an author’s individual short stories and re-publishing them together as a set, which led to the creation of both the short-story collection and the short-story cycle, as well as increased financial gain for publishers.

While recent scholars, such as Forrest Ingramⁱⁱ, Susan Garland Mannⁱⁱⁱ, and Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris, have debated over the defining line between a collection and a cycle, the two genres are separated by some distinct characteristics. In a collection, any of an author's individual short stories can be compiled together in any, non-specific order. The short-story cycle, on the other hand, is much more particular, emphasizing the connectedness of the individual stories and the idea of looking back.

The short-story cycle gains its name from the oral traditions in Europe. In *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle*, Nagel discusses the history of the cycle, asserting, "the short-story cycle is a rich genre with origins decidedly antecedent to the novel, with roots in the most ancient of narrative traditions. The historical meaning of 'cycle' is a collection of verse or narratives centering around some outstanding event or character" (1-2). The term "cycle" alone hints at the major difference between a collection and a cycle: the need for a unifying thread between every story and a return to the beginning. In both the short-story cycle and collection, the author has the freedom to explore innumerable cultures, time periods, and more, which is less common in the structure and plot of the traditional novel. While a collection can contain any combination of an author's short stories, the cycle is much more unified. The American short-story cycle stands apart from other genres because of its emphasis on looking back. The first story of a cycle sets up the pattern that will be strengthened through each following story until the last story looks back to the first and closes the loop. A short-story cycle demands a return to the beginning.

By creating a connecting thread between the individual stories of a cycle, the American short-story author is better able to portray the actuality of the human experience for people of various backgrounds. The short-story cycle is not limited by a continuous plot or narrative

structure. The individual stories of a cycle have the freedom to focus on any amount of different characters, jump around in time, and even focus on different areas of the world, thus allowing the author to show that the struggles and joys of the human experience are not limited by the boundaries of time and place. Nagel analyzes the earliest examples of the cycle and affirms that throughout “these early works two ideas became clear in the concept of a cycle: that each contributing unit of the work be an independent narrative episode, and that there be some principle of unification that gives structure, movement, and thematic development to the whole” (2). The individual short stories of a cycle are defined by their ability to stand alone but positioning them within a cycle strengthens the unifying principle and necessitates a return to the beginning.

The short-story cycles of Mary Wilkin Freeman’s *Six Trees* (1903), Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), and Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time* (1930) are all individually unified by their consideration of the relationship between nature and individual. As previously mentioned, Realism and Modernism place a considerable emphasis on setting and landscape, especially focusing on how individuals interact with the nature that surrounds them. In each of these three cycles, the main characters have specific interactions with woods and specific tree breeds, which helps each individual fill a void in his or her life, develop a true sense of identity, and, ultimately, achieve solace. In *Six Trees*, which explores how people of different ages and genders cope with loneliness and isolation, the audience is introduced to six main characters living in small towns who have all experienced great loss. The cycle’s first five stories climax when the main characters, who live unhappily hiding their true essence, each interact with a specific breed of tree, which incites each individual to begin expressing his or her authentic self. The final story calls back to the beginning of the cycle by depicting a family who maintains

genuine happiness despite their humble financial situation, which presents a solution to the loneliness of the other stories.

Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), on the other hand, introduces more than sixty characters who all live in the fictional town of Winesburg, introducing the audience to a variety of social classes, ages, and occupations as these characters struggle to find happiness in a monotonous town. In the cycle, the interactions of individuals with trees often arouse epiphanies, while the physical description of a character's location in relation to trees foreshadows the ultimate success or failure of his or her relationship, especially in the cases of George Willard, Elizabeth Willard, and Doctor Reefy. Finally, Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1930) offers an entirely different cycle structure through its eighteen vignettes that provide short glimpses into the lives of soldiers, bullfighters, a king, and more, as well as fifteen short stories—nine of which follow Hemingway's most notable character, Nick Adams. In the cycle, Nick is depicted surrounded by nature at pivotal points in his life both before and after his time serving in the war. Before the war, the woods act as a source of comfort as he struggles with his loss of innocence and begins to recognize the darker reality of the world. After the war, Nick is struggling with the atrocities he witnessed and the woods as a collective provide him with a sense of solace, while the specific tree breeds he interacts with offer greater cognizance into the true essence of Nick's character. While this project specifically examines these three short-story cycles, the methods of analyzing trees outlined in the upcoming chapters can be applied to innumerable works of literature.

CHAPTER 2

MARY WILKINS FREEMAN'S SIX TREES

In the mid-nineteenth century, the short story began to take shape as a distinct literary form when a considerable group of writers began producing works with the unmistakable characteristics of the short story known today. However, even as an established genre, the short story was neglected until 1923 when the first American short story critical book was published: Fred Lewis Pattee's *The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey*. Pattee's text established a separate canon for Americans. Only in the last several decades are critics giving the short-story genre the critical attention it deserves, and with this change, many underappreciated texts have come to light. Mary Wilkins Freeman's short-story cycle, *Six Trees*, is one of the many almost forgotten collections of the early twentieth century. Each of the six stories of this cycle features, and is named after, a different breed of tree. A collective examination of the short stories shows the connection between each tree, ancestral home, and individual, while an examination of the stories separately shows that each of the specific tree breeds' cultural usage reflects the true nature of each character.

All the stories, except for the last, present an individual living alone in his or her ancestral home in the woods, secluded from the nearby town. Each of the five stories begins with a description of the setting of the narrative that reveals a singular, personified tree growing near a familial home of which the occupant, like the tree, is the last living descendant of his or her family. The main characters in these opening texts all unknowingly possess a void in their lives that is filled in a moment of connection with a tree. Freeman uses the historical and cultural significance of each breed to strengthen the role of the tree for each character in filling this void, while also using the symbolic meaning of each breed to reinforce the change that occurs in each person. In the final story, the pattern of tree, individual, and ancestral home continues, but the

main character, Sam Maddox, has a wife and three children with whom he lives happily. The repeating motifs across each of the stories emphasize the importance of the final tree, the Apple tree, which is significantly the only fruit-bearing tree in the cycle. Shirley Marchalonis argues that the stories of this collection work together not as a formula, “but a frame, a kind of proscenium stage on which her dramas unfold. The stage is large enough to contain all the variations within her communities and to allow us to see the complexities of character and behavior that she portrays” (n.p.). The stories work together as a multiplicity that fortifies the underlying symbolism until the final story of the collection, which pushes against the established pattern.

The conceptual framework that Mary Wilkins Freeman develops in *Six Trees* mirrors, in many ways, what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari construct in their explanation of their theory of the rhizome. Freeman’s cycle as a whole addresses the historical and cultural values associated with these trees and human interactions with nature in general. But each story can also be addressed individually as a particular set of characters who each become intensely involved with a different species of tree. Freeman crafts a text in which the individual stories both rely on and push against the traditional symbolic values for these trees, coupled with the same avoidance or acceptance of traditional gender roles. Deleuze and Guattari’s theory about the connectedness of individual texts, which they termed the “rhizome” (21), can be applied to Freeman’s collection to highlight the importance of each specific tree breed. Each individual story is, in itself, a plateau, a “multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems” (22). When Deleuze and Guattari’s theory is applied to the cycle, the separated stories act as plateaus that can exist individually but remain linked with the other stories by the shared connections of trees, homes, and individuals—forming both a collection and a rhizome. The moment of

intimacy each character experiences with a tree reinforces the idea of the plateau, which is “always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end” (21). The stories illustrate the “middle” of these characters’ lives, which is shown through each story’s inclusion of an ancestral home, acting as reminder of the decades that have already passed; furthermore, as each story ends without definite closure, the text suggests each main character has only just begun to live life as he or she desires. But these characters are also in the “middle” of the transformation into their true selves, which is reinforced by focusing on the time immediately surrounding these characters’ recognition of their true selves as a result of a moment of connection with a tree. Any of these stories can be read independently, but each works affectively as a cycle, forming a multiplicity of reinforcing connections.

The cycle’s conceptual framework can be further developed by the moment of connection and subsequent transformation in identity that each main character’s experiences with a tree in the first five stories. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud presents his theories of dream-thoughts and dream-content, which can be applied to Freeman’s work to provide an understanding of the complete transformation each main character experiences. As Freud asserts, the dream-content “appears to us as a translation of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose symbols and laws of composition we must learn by comparing the origin with the translation” (174). The dream-thoughts are the true meaning of the dream, and through the dream work, the thoughts are transformed into the manifest dream-content. Ross C. Murfin asserts that dreams and literary fiction are creations of the mind, and “like a literary work, a dream may have some truth to tell, but, like a literary work, it may need to be interpreted before that truth can be grasped” (313). Each of the stories of *Six Trees* presents a manifest dream-content, and it is through each breed of tree that the latent dream-thoughts are presented. The

dream-content in each story is the initial way each of these characters is presented and how each one appears to the members of each town.

In each of these first five stories, the main character behaves in a way that is contrary to his or her true self. It is only after experiencing a bond with a tree that the individual character changes and begins to present his or her true self. In this way, the tree acts as the tool that deciphers the latent-dream thoughts, and just as with Freud's theory, it is only through these dream-thoughts that the manifest content is revealed. The tree metaphorically suggests the true nature of each character, thus allowing for a deeper understanding of the change that occurs within the individual characters.

The first five short stories of *Six Trees* begin with a description and history of the tree itself. The first story of *Six Trees*, and, therefore, the first plateau, is titled "The Elm Tree" and describes the Elm as standing alone in a field with such a commanding beauty that passersby must stop and stare. Traditionally depicted as male^{iv}, the Elm retains its historically conditioned gender, while the character's interactions with the tree can be seen as either gender-fluid or a deliberate transgression against the contemporary social moves regarding homosocial relationships. The Elm tree stands between the old house, in which David Ransom has always lived, and the new house he built for himself and his wife with his entire life's savings. Unfortunately, he loses this house to the bank before he and his wife are able to live in it (3-7). The physical description of the Elm makes no mention of vines, and according to Michael Ferber, the "elm's main symbolic meaning depends on its use as a support for vines...Elm and vine together stand for husband and wife" (69). The elm and vine appear as symbols of husband and wife in the works of Shakespeare, and Milton, as well as several other prominent authors^v. According to Ferber, in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, "Adriana says to the man she thinks is

her husband, ‘Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine’ (2.2.174)” (69), and in *Paradise Lost*, “Milton has Adam and Eve, before the Fall, doing their rural work: ‘they led the Vine / To wed her Elm; she spous’d about him twines / Her marriageable arms, and with her brings / Her dow’r th’adopted Clusters, to adorn / His barren leaves’ (5.216–20)” (70). These works each act as individual plateaus that are connected to *Six Trees* within the rhizome, which strengthens the elm tree’s symbolic role as husband. In spite of this widely used symbol of elm and vine together, in Freeman’s story, the absence of a vine on the Elm reinforces the significance of the tree in relation to David, for David loses his wife from heartbreak shortly after they lose their new house. The Elm tree has no vines to support, just as David was unable to support his wife by losing the home in which she had waited decades to live. When some of the townspeople come to take David away to a nursing home, he climbs the Elm tree and makes a home in its boughs. Freeman reverses the contemporaneous gender roles by having David take on the role of wife, supported by the Elm and symbolically becoming the vine, while the tree acts as a husband by providing him with a home.

The Elm’s significance to David Ransom is further revealed by the tree’s connection to the plateaus of European and Greek literature. In many classic works of literature, Elm trees appear in relation to images of death and the afterlife, metaphorically connecting the living to those they have lost. Virgil’s *Aeneid* acts as the Greek plateau builds upon the Elm’s symbolic significance, considering that in the epic, as Fred Hageneder affirms, “the tree was found in the Underworld” (210). The Elm is associated with the underworld, and David Ransom is an elderly man who has lost his wife and the rest of his family. This connection of the Elm to the underworld suggests that David finds comfort within the branches of the Elm because it allows him to feel close once again with his deceased wife. This symbolic connection of the Elm to the

dead is additionally seen in the plateaus of several European traditions: “in Scandinavia, the Baltic, and northern Germany, the elm was one of the *Vartraed*—a guardian of the farmland and a supernatural gate between the worlds of human and nature spirits” (Hageneder 210). In the Elm, David finds solace because he is close to the ones he has lost but is not ready to join. Until David’s time comes to die, he can visit the Elm whenever he wants and feel that connection with the other side.

The importance of the Elm as a home for David is foreshadowed in the physical descriptions of the tree in the beginning. The narrator describes the Elm, who is personified as male, as a tree that commanded an appreciation of his beauty by those who passed (4). Similarly, the new home that David builds is described as pretentious and ornate, which suggests that David is first drawn to the tree because it fills the void left by the loss of the new house. Before his connection with the tree, David’s manifest or superficial persona, at least for the members of the town, is that he is a severe and hateful man. Living in the beautiful Elm fills the void for David of never having lived in the beautiful home he built and helps him to realize his true self. After living in the shadow of his lost home for years, his desire is fulfilled by the Elm, and it changes him: “All [his] bitterness and rancor were gone” (33). Freeman describes his face as one who has finally found sanctuary from the hardships of life (33). The final scene of the story shows David living with his neighbor and a woman asking him where his house is—to which he simply points at the Elm. Even after leaving the tree, it will always be home for David. The physical description is similar to the home David lost, which allows the tree to fill the void left by its absence, as well as the void left by the death of his wife. This connection with the tree reveals David’s latent need for support. Before this interaction, it seems likely that he will die an unhappy, lonely man, but the tree shows David what he truly needs. In the Elm, David finds a

place of support, happiness, and freedom from those who wanted to dictate how he would spend the rest of his life.

The motif of a solitary tree and singular main character connects the plateau of “The Elm Tree” with the second short story, or plateau, “The White Birch.” The White Birch had many “sisters,” (43) but they all died, and the narrator describes the tree as always feeling as if a limb were missing. The physical description of the tree similarly reflects the main character, Joseph Lynn, who is “the last of his race” and who lives secluded from the rest of the town in his ancestral home (46). Joseph spends most of his time unaware of his own loneliness, convinced he is happy alone. The Birch and Joseph both experience these periods of contentedness, but then, like Joseph, the Birch sometimes “had a bewildered feeling that something was wrong, that something was gone. She lived in a grove where there were many other birch-trees, most of them growing in clumps; and sometimes, looking at them, she had a sense of loss” (45). The clumps are reflective of the family unit. Though there are many other birch trees around, she feels a sense of loss because her own family’s cluster has almost entirely disappeared. Joseph, too, is not outwardly pained by the loss of his family, but still senses something missing from his life. The Birch and Joseph share this ability to glimpse the latent content of their selves, but most of the time they are unaware of the inherent void. At first, he tries to fill this emptiness by getting engaged to a young girl named Sarah, which becomes the subject of much gossip in the town: “Nobody dreamed that she loved him. The girl was poor. She went about dress-making from house to house to support herself; and Joseph had his comfortable home, and income enough to almost keep her in luxury, or what meant luxury to a girl of her standing in life” (48). Joseph is so desperate to fill the void in his life that he does not see what the rest of the town can see—that Sarah is marrying him for comfort rather than love. But before the wedding, Sarah leaves him for

her former lover, and Joseph could “scarcely believe in the reality of that which had befallen him; there was in his soul an awful pain of readjustment to its old ways” (63). Joseph attempts to fill the void left by the loss of his family with Sarah, but losing her in her betrayal leaves him more aware of his loneliness than ever before.

When Sarah fails him, the White Birch brings Joseph a sense of solace when he sits down beside the tree and “leaned against her frail, swaying body, and felt her silvery skin against his cheek, and all at once the dearness of that which is always left in the treasure-house of nature for those who are robbed came over him and satisfied him” (64). This simple act of sitting beside the Birch works almost mystically, immediately curing Joseph of his heartache. Jane Gifford asserts that the birch tree “teaches the lesson of unselfishness and of caring for the needs of others in ways that help them to flourish of their own accord” (14). After his interaction with the Birch, he is happy for Sarah and does not interfere with her return to her former lover because he is no longer selfish and wants her to flourish in her life with the man she truly loves: “With no pain he began to think of her as the bride of the other man” (67). The White Birch is a symbol of Joseph’s renewal, of the latent desire for motherhood he did not realize he had. Fred Hageneder asserts that in Russian tradition, “the birch itself is called Lady of the Forest. The nourishing, caring birch is an image of the White Goddess, and the Germanic rune Berkana, ‘Birch,’ stands for motherhood, bosom and protection” (42-43). The tree’s symbolic significance in “The White Birch” is further developed by the Russian and German plateaus. Hageneder additionally claims that according to Irish myth, “*ogam*, the tree alphabet, was first used to warn the sun god Lugh that his wife was about to be captured and taken to the underworld, ‘unless she is guarded by birch’” (43). The Irish, Russian, and German plateaus are linked together by the Birch and its association with protection, and these allusions to other plateaus strengthen the symbolic purpose

of the tree in Freeman's story. Joseph has lost his entire family and has now lost Sarah, the only female presence in his life in years. In the Birch Joseph finds what he always needed but did not realize he was missing—a sense of motherly protection. Hageneder affirms the color of the Birch, white, reaffirms the motherly nature of the tree by symbolizing mother's milk (43). After years of living alone, Joseph finally is able to fill the void left by the loss of his family by his connection to this tree. It becomes the mother he has long since forgotten, and as long he is under the protection of the Birch, he, like Lugh's wife, is safe from death.

The third short story, "The Great Pine," begins not in a familial home, but in the woods on a mountainside. A man referred to only as "Dick" left behind his wife and daughter years ago to earn money for his family as a sailor. But he never sent money, and after years of hard work with no payoff, he is traveling through the woods to return home. Dick accidentally walks in circles through the woods and passes the Pine three times before growing angry and setting the tree on fire. Regretting his action, he puts out the flames: "At that moment, for the first time in his history, he rose superior to his own life...He, through saving the tree from himself, gained a greater spiritual growth than the tree had gained in height since it first quickened with life" (79). This dubious act of heroism, though only necessary because of his own actions, brings about a change in Dick. He becomes determined to get home and remedy the hurt caused by his mistakes. Marchalonis writes that in this story and the next, "the protagonists, each burdened with his or her own kind of pain, are drawn out of self by the need to save a tree, and the act itself sets free human and humanizing emotions long repressed" (n.p.). Dick has been holding on to the guilt of abandoning his family and rejecting his traditional role as provider. He is absent for years, never sends any promised money home, and returns without a penny to his name. However, the act of saving the tree saves him. He is able to rid himself of the guilt of his actions

only after his encounter with the Pine—a tree that stands above the other trees, providing perspective. Gifford claims the Pine advises us to “cleanse ourselves of negativity, neither dwelling on mistakes nor apportioning blame. Pine is a symbol of the elevated mind and the birth of the spiritual warrior” (148). Before Dick saved the tree, he kept circling back to the Pine and seemed unable to make it home. Afterwards, he is able to move on from the mistakes of his past and head directly home, suggesting that he knew the way home from the beginning and, whether intentional or not, was avoiding it out of fear.

A tree again is in need of being saved in “The Balsam Fir,” which follows Martha Elder, who lives alone as a result of her sister marrying the man everyone believed would marry her. Unlike the main characters of the other short stories, Martha’s solitude comes as a result of the betrayal of her sister rather than the death of her relatives. Martha at first seems happy with solitude, until Christmas draws near and she realizes how much she wants to celebrate the season with a Christmas tree. Her desire reflects what the tree, according to Hageneder, symbolizes the connections amongst all life (145). This Christmas has brought about a change in Martha. When she looks upon the Balsam fir, she sees the connections that she has missed while living in solitude, and she can no longer convince herself that she is happy being alone. The Balsam fir is a symbol of all the missed connections in life, and when she saves the tree, she realizes she can no longer pretend to be indifferent toward her isolation.

The alienation Martha feels continues until the Balsam fir is threatened. She looks out the window and sees “the splendid fir-balsam opposite, and at the same time a man with an axe, preparing to cut it down” (119). From this moment forth, everything is changed by a man trying to take away this symbol of connection to all life. Martha saves the Balsam and develops a strong connection to it, and when she looks upon it, sees herself in her youth and her right to experience

happiness. Just like Dick with the Pine tree, Martha is changed after she saves the life of the tree. Hagedener maintains that the reason Christmas is celebrated with the fir is its symbolic function as the Tree of Light (145). The religious symbolism of light is then twofold: it alludes to the date of creation in the first book of the Bible when God says, "Let there be Light," and it embodies the birth of Jesus and mankind's salvation from sin. After Martha's connection with the tree, she "became sure that whatever happiness God gives He never retakes, and, moreover, that He holds ready the food for all longing" (126). The Balsam Fir sparks in Martha an appreciation for the preciousness of life and the power of God. In the moments before the tree is in danger, she begins to believe she needs a husband to have a fulfilled life and a real Christmas. She then has this moment of intimacy with the tree and it helps her to understand her ability to create a life of happiness for herself. This religious symbol inspires a woman who has never been religious to believe in the work of God and His influence in her life. The Balsam Fir changes Martha from a lonely woman searching for a husband and devoid of religion into a woman who finds her sense of fulfillment in herself and in the promises of God.

The next story offers another plateau, which is linked to the other stories by its motif of a main character who has experienced loss and has not yet recovered from it, but who becomes strengthened by a moment with a tree. "The Lombardy Poplar" again focuses on an unmarried woman, Sarah Dunne, living alone in a familial home. The Poplar was a part of a family of five, but as "the tree was the last of his immediate family, so the woman who lived in the house was the last of hers" (132). Like the tree, Sarah's entire family, including her twin sister, has passed away. Her only remaining relative is a cousin, whose name is also Sarah, and who is almost identical in looks, clothes, and personality. The narrator repeats that it has been five years since Sarah and her cousin became close, and it is only now that they experience their first

disagreement (137). This disagreement was sparked when Sarah says, “I’ve seen that popple there ever since I can remember, and it’s all I’ve got left that’s anyways alive, and it seems like my own folks, and I can’t help it” (145). Her cousin is outraged that Sarah could put a tree on equal footing with her family, and so the cousins stop speaking.

The Lombardy Poplar, a member of the black poplar species, garners its symbolic significance from the Greek’s Homer. Hageneder recounts that Homer “mentions the black poplar being at the entrance to Hades, the realm of the dead—hence their link with graveyards” (156). The Lombardy Poplar is a member of the black poplar species. As Sarah looks upon the Poplar and imagines her dead relatives, the tree’s metaphorical connection with the dead is enhanced. The Greek plateau reinforces the tree’s symbolic meaning of, as defined by Hageneder, “[d]escent, protection,” as well as the Poplar’s overall cultural relevance (156). The Poplar stands as a symbol of her family and offers a sense of protection to her now that she is alone in the world. She then takes inspiration from the tree to become her own woman, for when she looks again at the Poplar, she “seemed like another person. The tree seemed to cast a shadow of likeness over her. She appeared straighter, taller; all her lines of meek yielding, or scarcely even anything so strong as yielding, of utter passiveness, vanished” (148). Her whole life has been spent in the shadow of her older twin, after whose death Sarah gains a new twin in the form of her cousin. There are many varieties of poplars in her yard, but the Lombardy stands alone and separate.

“The Lombardy Poplar” reinforces the patterns in this short-story cycle by displaying a complete reversal in the disposition of a character after a moment of intimacy with a tree, a motif already displayed in the first three stories. Sarah Dunne’s new personality does not come out of nowhere but is something she desired all along; she just did not realize it until it was made

manifest by the Poplar. Before she interacts with the Poplar, Sarah truly believes she is satisfied living as one half of a whole and does not appear to desire individuality because after the interaction, her face changes: “Her mouth was firm, her chin high, her eyes steady, and, more than all, there was over her an expression of individuality which had not been there before” (148). But the tree reveals the latent desire she harbors to stand apart from the rest. J.E. Cirlot asserts that the poplar “has a special allegorical significance connected with the fact that the two sides of the poplar leaf are of a different shade of green. Thus, it becomes the tree of life, bright green on the side of water (moon) and a darker green on the side of fire (sun)” (261). Sarah herself is like a poplar leaf with each side of the leaf representing in turn her manifest content and her concealed latent content. Throughout her whole life she has acted and looked the same as the rest of the Dunne family, following their traditional morals and values, and acting as the bright green side of the leaf:

Sarah Dunn, clad in a gown of dark-red silk and a bonnet tufted with pink roses, holding aloft a red parasol, passed down the street to meeting. No Dunn had ever worn, within the memory of man, any colors save purple and black and faded green or drab, never any but purple or white or black flowers in her bonnet. No woman of half her years, and seldom a young girl, was ever seen in the village clad in red (164).

But now, dressed in bright red, she is the darker green side of the leaf—the side of fire. Marchalonis argues, “she expresses her individuality by appearing in church in a flaming crimson dress and bonnet, an outfit totally unsuitable for an elderly spinster in a humdrum village, [and] creates shocked amusement in her peers and enlivens the Sunday morning service” (n.p.). Sarah reveals her individuality, her other side, not only to her cousin-twin, but to the community gathering that most represents and upholds the traditional values. She proudly walks

into a church service where the entirety of the town has gathered and prides herself on her difference from them.

The last of the short stories, “The Apple Tree,” continues the other stories’ motifs of tree and ancestral home, but unlike the solitary characters of the other stories, the main character, Sam Maddox, is married with three children, which is mirrored in the symbolism of the family’s tree. The Maddox family’s tree is the only tree in any of the stories that is a fruit-bearing tree, and, just like the tree, Sam is the only character who produces children or “bears fruit.” The apple fruit, like the trees of the first five stories, garners its cultural significance through its connection to other plateaus within the rhizome. The apple is associated classically and in Hebrew tradition with, as Cirlot asserts, “sexual love” (13). Sam is the only focal character in *Six Trees* who is perpetually happy. His loving, fulfilling relationship with his wife, Adeline, has left him with nothing to be desired. Unlike the protagonists of the other stories, he has nothing to work toward in his life. He may be poor, but he does not care because he is happy and in love.

While Cirlot confirms the apple’s relevance in traditional Hebrew culture, the fruit is additionally connected to the plateaus of ancient Greek literature, which Gifford confirms: “Like many other goddesses of love, Aphrodite’s symbol was the apple, which, when cut in two, reveals a five-pointed star around the core, another of her symbols” (97). Sam and his family have the symbol of the goddess of love planted in their yard, and they become the embodiment of the goddess. Just like the apple that is cut in two to reveal five points, the Maddox’s are a family of five. Sam and Adeline represent the two halves of the apple: they have come together and then separated three times to produce the five-pointed star. The Hebrew and Greek plateaus emphasize the contrast between “The Apple Tree” and the other short stories by highlighting the apple’s many connections with love and fertility.

Hageneder further confirms the apple's widespread connection to fertility: "In many European fairytales, the eating of an apple ensures offspring" (127). Sam is the only one of the main characters in the collection able to have children because he is the only one who has a loving, sexual relationship. The health of Sam and Adeline's relationship is further confirmed in the blossoms of Sam's Apple tree that are "unusually rosy" (174). Red is the color of passion, determination, and love, and the detail that the tree's apples are redder than normal reiterates that the relationship of Sam and Adeline is not only more loving than any other's in their own story, but that it is more loving than anyone's relationship in the cycle.

Freeman furthers the importance of the Apple tree in this story by contrasting the Maddox family with their elderly neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Blake. The Maddox family is incredibly poor, to the point that they rarely have a decent meal, and yet they are incredibly happy. Mr. and Mrs. Blake, on the other hand, are quite wealthy for this town, but are very unhappy. Mrs. Blake deeply cleans her house once a month and forces her husband to help. When she calls upon Sam to help her clean after her husband is injured, he only agrees to help after she rescinds her offer to pay him. He is the embodiment of the Apple tree, which Gifford affirms, "teaches the lesson of love and faith, generosity and gratitude. Love not just between man and woman but as the driving force behind our existence and the relationships that we share with others" (100). Sam is only willing to work if it is motivated by generosity and kindness, not greed or financial gain.

The two families are not only contrasted in behaviors, but in the symbolism of their respective trees. When Sam begins to help Mrs. Blake, he looks at the small Pear tree that resides in the Blake yard and says, "Your pear-tree don't amount to much, does it?" (197). Since this tree has never borne fruit, it is the precise symbol of Mrs. Blake's infertility and asexuality.

Keiko Dilbeck asserts that “in primitive cultures pear trees...symbolize the sexuality/fertility of women” (102). Mr. and Mrs. Blake have grown old without ever reproducing, and the pear tree hints that the reason is Mrs. Blake. Hageneder writes, “Like the apple, the pear has always has a strong connection with children, fertility, and prosperity. But while the apple often appears in male-female customs concerning courtship and marriage, the pear tends to be associated solely with the female gender” (170). The apple and the pear tree are very near to each other in symbolic meaning with one major difference. The difference of this distinction comes to fruition in the comparison of the two neighboring families. When Sam suggests that the Pear tree might have been trimmed too much, Mrs. Blake remarks that she will not have dead or withered branches on her tree because she believes in keeping her trees as neat as her house (198). On the contrary, Sam has never tempted to tame his Apple tree, and it is flourishing. The symbolic meaning of the Apple tree is equally split between both genders and has led to a fruitful relationship between Sam and Adeline. Sam has not tried to control nature, or his wife, and this stance has rewarded him well. The specifically female Pear tree has led to a childless, unhappy marriage in the case of the Blakes. Mrs. Blake feels the need to regulate the Pear, just as she does her husband, and the result is a tree that is unyielding and a marriage that is without love, passion, or children. The contrasting of these two families and their respective trees highlights the importance of an equal partnership for a successful marriage.

The short-story cycle distinguishes itself from the short-story collection through an emphasis on looking back and returning to the beginning at the end of the text. “The Apple Tree” completes the cycle and looks back to the other stories by offering a solution to the loneliness that is displayed in the beginning of each of the first five stories. In the other stories, the characters are unhappy because they focus only on that which they do not have and ignore the

simple pleasures of life; however, in “The Apple Tree,” the Maddox family are incredibly poor and rarely know where their next meal will come from, yet they exist in a state of seemingly perpetual happiness. They ignore the scrutiny of others, especially Mrs. Blake, and look beyond the material, spending each day living as they truly desire. To the contrary, when David Ransom is introduced in “The Elm Tree,” he is filled with bitterness over the loss of his wife and second home. It is only after his moment with the Elm that he realizes how much he truly has and how much life still has to offer. In “The White Birch,” Joseph Lynn arranges to marry a woman who does not love him out of fear of isolation until the Birch takes on the role of mother and protector, making Joseph realize he is content living alone. The sailor, Dick, in “The Great Pine” is paralyzed by the fear of facing his family before the Pine pushes him to face his fears, thus allowing him to see that mistakes of the past can be remedied with hard work in the present. Martha of “The Balsam Fir” lives as an old maid and does not celebrate Christmas because she believes celebrating the holiday is depressing without a family. It is not until she has a moment with the Fir in her yard that she realizes all that life still has to offer and the importance of putting faith in God’s promises. In “The Lombardy Poplar,” Sarah Dunn lives a life always in the shadow of another family member until the Poplar shows her that one can be an individual without shirking one’s family. In each of these stories, the focal character has a void in his or her life until a moment of intimacy with a tree evokes that which he or she needed to fill the void and live happily. In the final story, Sam Maddox does not have a moment where he connects with the Apple tree because even though his family lives in poverty, he is happy.

Mary Wilkins Freeman uses the first five stories of *Six Trees* to reinforce the commensal relationship of individual and tree, which fills the void created by the loss of his or her family and restores a sense of purpose and appreciation for life in each character. The specific breed

reveals the dream-thoughts, and thereby the latent nature, of each character, as well as becoming a source of solace as each character transforms his or her life. The final story presents the only fruit-bearing tree, which exemplifies the fulfilled family whose unlimited contentedness in the face of poverty emphasizes the importance of love. An understanding of the cultural significance and symbolic meaning of each tree variety contributes to a more comprehensive recognition of the role of trees in the rejuvenation of the characters, while also revealing the intricate, spiritual connection between tree and individual that Freeman solidifies through each of the six stories.

CHAPTER 3

SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S WINESBURG, OHIO

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the American people inhabited a vast land resulting in dialects, behaviors, and cultures that were distinctive to their regions. The authors of regional short fiction emphasized the defining idiosyncrasies of the landscape and people, highlighting the distinctiveness of the country, while at the same time showing the similar struggles all humans endure—thus contributing to a comprehensive sense of identity. Often viewed as a regional writer, Sherwood Anderson, in his 1919 short-story cycle, *Winesburg, Ohio*, presents a town unique in its ability to encapsulate a specific place; at the same time, however, Winesburg could be any ordinary town in America. Anderson includes an abundance of symbolic images throughout the text, with trees being one of the most prominent. Trees are often seen in literature as symbolic of growth, new beginnings, and the cyclical nature of time, as displayed by the central characters of Mary Wilkins Freeman's *Six Trees*. But unlike Freeman's cycle that connects a character with a specific tree breed, *Winesburg, Ohio* focuses on the relationship of characters and nonspecific trees. Anderson uses the symbolic nature of these trees to reflect the growth of his characters, particularly George Willard, and to echo his belief that we must not dwell too long in the safety of the familiar. A close examination of the physical description of trees in the text additionally reveals that a character's physical position in relation to a tree suggests the ultimate success or failure of his or her relationships, as well as the character's emotional state.

Trees appear in the landscape of nineteen of the twenty-two short stories of *Winesburg, Ohio*, and a majority of characters are described at some point in the cycle by their physical relation to a tree. The most frequently described location of the characters is in the shadows or darkness of the trees, and beneath or underneath the trees. In the darkness or shadows of the

trees, characters often experience gloomy or pessimistic states of mind, while characters pictured beneath trees are typically seen accompanied by lovers in states of happiness or contentedness. The text confirms the importance of trees for lovers: “In the wooded places are many little cloistered nooks, quiet places where lovers go to sit on Sunday afternoons. Through the trees they look out across the fields and see farmers at work about the barns or people driving up and down on the roads” (61). Throughout the cycle, almost every couple is described in relation to trees, and their positioning foreshadows the success or failure of their relationship. Successful pairings are seen walking beneath the trees or stopping beside trees, whereas the relationships that are destined to fail meet in the shadows or darkness of the trees.

A close reading of the descriptions of characters in relation to trees can be used to decipher the true nature of many of the relationships in the cycle. The relationship of George Willard and his mother, Elizabeth, is reflected in their individual relationships with trees. Elizabeth Willard is described both underneath the trees and in the darkness, emphasizing her naivety when it comes to matters of the heart. The narrator depicts Elizabeth as a young woman going out with traveling men who always “seemed to understand and sympathize with her. On the side streets of the village, in the darkness under the trees, they took hold of her hand and she thought that something unexpressed in herself came forth and became a part of an unexpressed something in them” (20). Elizabeth appears both underneath and in the darkness of trees because she is searching for companionship and deludes herself into believing the traveling men are searching for the same thing. Martin Bidney adds further insight into the true nature of George’s mother: “Elizabeth dreams of combining male boldness and female intimacy, of ‘wandering over the world, seeing always new faces and giving something out of herself to all people’ (46)” (264). Elizabeth inexorably believes each of the traveling men she meets beneath the trees will

take her along as he travels the country. She and the men appear both underneath the trees, the spot typically associated with lovers in the text, and in the darkness of the trees, the position that often anticipates failed relationships, to reflect Elizabeth's and the traveling men's differing perceptions of the relationship. For George's mother, these meetings in the woods are a chance to have a connection with a man who was struggling with her same issues, as well as the opportunity to escape Winesburg and travel the world. However, for each of the traveling men, Elizabeth is nothing more than a girl to use for sex before moving on to the next town. Elizabeth goes beneath the trees expecting to find her future husband but is instead used by men who have no intentions of remaining in Winesburg or bringing her with them.

Elizabeth's need to search for a connection beneath the trees is a trait passed down to her son, George, who is frequently described with women underneath trees. George Willard has two main love interests throughout the stories: Belle Carpenter and Helen White. His relationship with Belle is a failed one because the "young man was not in love with the woman...but as they walked about under the trees they occasionally embraced" (65). George enters into a relationship with Belle knowing he is not in love with her, but because he desires her. The doomed nature of their relationship is further expressed by Belle, who is in love with another man, Ed Handby, but "did not think that her station in life would permit her to be seen in the company of the bartender and walked about under the trees with George Willard and let him kiss her to relieve a longing that was very insistent in her nature" (99). Though the couple walks beneath the trees together and have a physical connection, they do not have an emotional one and their affections lie elsewhere; therefore, their relationship will never grow. This sentiment is reinforced by the description of Belle's house, which "was surrounded by pine trees and there was no grass beneath the trees" (98). The trees George and Belle walk together beneath have no grass growing

beneath, which reflects the lack of growth in their relationship. According to Theresa Dietz, the pine tree symbolically represents “boldness; courage; daring; endurance; hope” (224). The pine trees are not thriving; thus, they work symbolically in this scene to show the lack of courage and boldness displayed by George and Belle in continuing a relationship they each know is loveless. Both parties are choosing to stay beneath the trees in a relationship that lacks growth instead of daring to pursue what they truly desire. Though George and Belle are beneath the trees, any happiness they experience there is only temporary and superficial.

The false happiness George Willard finds beneath the trees mirrors his own mother’s experiences. Elizabeth appears unaware of the reality of her meetings with the traveling men beneath the trees and feels a naive happiness there because she believes the men are truly forming a connection with her: “It was always the same, beginning with kisses and ending, after strange wild emotions, with peace and then sobbing repentance” (46). Eventually, however, Elizabeth’s frequent rendezvous with various men leave her with minimal options for future husbands, so she settles for marrying Tom Willard. Her life with Tom is an unhappy one where she spends almost every day in the solitude of their bedroom. Her only means of escape are visits with Doctor Reefy, with whom she feels a great sense of connection and who is the man she truly loves, rather than her husband: “for years [Elizabeth] had hated her husband, her hatred had always been before a quite impersonal thing. He had been merely a part of something else that she hated. Now, and by the few words at the door, he had become the thing personified” (45). Their relationship begins at a time when Doctor Reefy feels a need growing within him to pray, so he creates his own gods to which he prays. The doctor believes Elizabeth worships the same gods as he and says, “I have a notion that she came to the office because she thought the gods would be there but she was happy to find herself not alone just the same. It was an experience

that cannot be explained” (123). The connection between Doctor Reefy and Elizabeth is established instantly in their shared need to speak their truths. They imagine these gods as a means of confessing the thoughts they cannot share with others. Doctor Reefy is compared in the text to an apple tree, and Ralph Ciancio argues, “he stuffs into his pockets the round hard balls of paper he has written his thoughts on until they are full to overflowing, at which time, like a tree shedding its harvest, he spills his thoughts on the floor or tosses them to his friend John Spaniard, who, not by coincidence, owns an apple orchard” (1004). Through this imagery of the apple tree shedding his personal truths, Doctor Reefy becomes the Tree of Knowledge and the only genuine source of truth in Winesburg.

Doctor Reefy’s connection to truth is what drives the relationship between him and Elizabeth. Robert Dunne argues that in the story “Death,” “Elizabeth sees in Doctor Reefy an understanding other who shares with her the intensity of passion that she could not achieve with George and had not achieved with others in her youth” (187). Elizabeth finally experiences the connection she was always searching for beneath the trees with other men, but she finds it too late as she is already married to Tom Willard and Doctor Reefy is married to a young woman. Elizabeth leaves Doctor Reefy’s office and returns home, and the elation she felt with him disappears in the darkness of her bedroom. When she begins to weep, she remembers Doctor Reefy’s words: “You must not try to make love definite. It is the divine accident of life. If you try to be definite and sure about it and to live beneath the trees, where soft night winds blow, the long hot day of disappointment comes swiftly and the gritty dust from passing wagons gathers upon lips inflamed and made tender by kisses” (124). In her son, George, she sees a reflection of herself: a boy who stays beneath the trees with women he does not love, preferring the security of the familiar in a town that does not make him happy.

Though there is no potential for genuine love, George continues to seek out Belle beneath the trees, just as his mother sought out the traveling men. For Belle, meeting beneath the trees allows her to satisfy some of the desire she feels for the bartender, Ed. Sally Adair Rigsbee argues the reason George continues to consort with Belle because each “male’s grotesqueness is indicated by the gap between his intense need of the feminine and his inability to establish relationships with real women” (181). For George, being underneath the trees becomes a means of escape from the unpleasant truths of life and a way of satisfying his desires without committing to a real relationship. But reality comes crashing down upon George in the very place he intends to escape it when Ed Handby comes to take Belle back from George. Ed throws George into the bushes three times with George continuing to return to fight until finally “George Willard’s head struck the root of a tree and he lay still. Then Ed Handby took Belle Carpenter by the arm and marched her away” (104). The role of the tree works symbolically as the Tree of Knowledge and George’s head hitting the root of the tree is metaphorically significant as roots grow deep into the soil and serve as the foundation for the tree’s growth. George is heading towards an epiphany about life, and from this point on, he is changed to the core. He no longer wants to waste time beneath the trees with a woman he does not love.

The change in George Willard is substantiated when he next appears in relation to a tree. This time when he walks beneath the trees, they evoke all of the thoughts George was avoiding while seeing Belle: “Ambitions and regrets awake within him. Suddenly something happens; he stops under a tree and waits as for a voice calling his name. Ghosts of old things creep into his consciousness; the voices outside of himself whisper a message concerning the limitations of life. From being quite sure of himself and his future he becomes not at all sure” (131). As an employee of the town’s newspaper, George gets a glimpse into every citizen’s life and realizes

that in Winesburg, almost everyone who moves there or is born there ends up trapped in an unhappy marriage or disappointed with life. George is no longer content with living the safe, sheltered life the other townspeople live; he wants a future that does not exist in the safety of the familiarity of the trees, but is exciting and unknown.

George Willard's revelation about a life spent dwelling beneath the trees is reflective of Doctor Reefy's advice to Elizabeth about attempting to make love definite. In order to live a full life with meaning, George must abandon the security of Winesburg, where he fears he would be fated to marry someone he does not truly love and work a job that will never fulfill him—as is the fate of the other Winesburg residents, especially his mother. Instead, he wishes to leave Winesburg and join the modern world as Helen and George “had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible” (243). This experience with Helen is what George resolves to search for outside of Winesburg and the death of his mother finally motivates him to take action, which David Stouck confirms: “In almost every book Anderson published the death of a beloved character is of crucial significance and casts the protagonist's life in a wholly different perspective” (526). Elizabeth's death finally motivates George to make more out of his life rather than simply accepting the restlessness the town engendered in its inhabitants. In leaving Winesburg, he will escape the “defeat” Elizabeth has felt at the hands of the town and will fulfill her dying hope for him to have a better future than her own.

Suffused with this determination to break the cycle, George seeks the company of Helen White one last time. The pair depart together, and when they reach the top of Waterworks Hill “they stopped by a tree and George again put his hands on the girl's shoulders. She embraced him eagerly and then again they drew quickly back from that impulse. They stopped kissing and

stood a little apart. Mutual respect grew in them” (136). In this final scene together, they do not dwell beneath the trees, but are described as alongside them. Significantly, it is beside a tree that George is again moved to initiate corporeal touch between him and Helen, and it is this physical contact that matures them, allowing them each to move forward, as confirmed by Walter Rideout: “The possibility of physical touch between two human beings always implies, even if by negative counterpart, at least the possibility of a profounder moment of understanding between them” (173). By the trees and in this moment of physical connection, they gain respect for one another and are no longer stuck within the ideal context of the tree. They are no longer meeting other people beneath and within the shadows of trees, searching for a connection they know does not exist. Celia Esplugas believes that Helen is “one of the few women whose life has been shaped so as to afford her the possibility of living successfully away from Winesburg. Her feelings...are controlled and her demeanor self-possessed due to her affluent and supportive family” (164). While Esplugas credits Helen’s changed demeanor to her family’s class and wealth, but it is the moment beside the tree and the physical connection with George that pushes her to self-actualize. This self-actualization leads to her reverence for George. Helen is now able to respect and appreciate his need to leave and willingly sends George off on the train to search for his purpose in life. When standing beside a tree, knowledge comes to the characters in *Winesburg, Ohio* as exemplified by George’s revelation and George and Helen’s growth in understanding in this final scene.

Before Helen ever reaches this moment of understanding, she is faced with a relationship that has no potential for growth with Seth Richmond, much as George experiences with Belle. George Willard’s destiny to end up with Helen and not Seth is foreshadowed by the tree imagery described in her outings with the two men. With George, Anderson described them beneath and

beside the trees in moments of connection and increased respect. Contrarily with Seth Richmond, as they “walked through the streets beneath the trees...their way was half lighted, half darkened, by the lamps and by the deepening shadows cast by the low-branched trees” (75). Just as the path laid before them is split between light and darkness, Helen’s own path is split between Seth and George. Throughout the cycle, Helen will have to decide which person will light the path for her and which will darken it. Her choice is foreshadowed by Seth, who “imagined himself lying on a summer evening, buried deep among the weeds beneath the tree. Beside him, in the scene built in his fancy, lay Helen White, her hand lying in his hand” (76). Seth is only pictured with Helen beneath the trees in his dreams—never in reality. Andrew Corey Yerkes connects these dreaming fantasies to the influence of Freud: “In addition to representations of repression, the Freudian aspects that critics noticed included the work’s compositional free association, its inclusion of and resemblance to dreams, and its focus on ‘day-dreamers, perverts, the “inhibited,” the morally atrophied, the erotics, and the Eccentrics”” (199). Anderson’s Freudian use of dreams^{vi}, especially trees within dreams, implicate the characters who will never gain what they desire; just as Seth is unable to spend time with Helen beneath the trees in reality, he will never be able to make a relationship with her a reality. Even after spending an evening with her, Seth is described thus: “He stopped in the shadow of a large tree and looked at his mother sitting by a lighted window busily sewing. The feeling of loneliness that had visited him earlier in the evening returned and colored his thoughts of the adventure through which he had just passed” (77). Seth’s happiness with Helen is temporary and does not last in the face of the grim reality of his life. A life with Helen will never be more than a dream for Seth that fades away when he awakens and is confronted with the truth.

The descriptions of trees do not only foreshadow the fate of major couples in the collection but reflects the future of minor couples as well. In reference to Joe Welling and Sarah King, the narrator asserts, “The couple looked ridiculous together. Under the trees they walked and Joe talked. His passionate eager protestations of love, heard coming out of the darkness by the cemetery wall, or from the deep shadows of the trees on the hill that ran up to the fair grounds from Waterworks Pond, were repeated in the stores” (57). In this case the couple is described as both underneath and in the shadows of trees, which reflects the contrast between how Joe and Sarah feel about their relationship and how the outside world feels. Joe and Sarah are very much in love and enjoy their time together beneath the trees, but the shadows and darkness reflect the aura cast by the town’s rejection of their union. Sarah is described as a “lean, sad-looking woman,” (57) while Joe’s father “had been a man of some dignity in the community, a lawyer, and a member of the state legislature at Columbus” (53). Joe Welling comes from an established and respected family and is expected to pursue a more respectable woman. It does not matter to the town the true feelings Joe and Sarah feel for each other; they only care about how she appears on the surface—just as they judge the relationship based solely on its appearance.

Trees work symbolically not only in terms of the characters’ positioning, but also as a reflection of the characters themselves. Epifanio San Juan, Jr. argues that, “in order to render and organize the inarticulate sensibilities of his characters, Anderson exploits natural scenery as an objective fact whose emotive charge or connotativeness may act as an index or correlative key to the affective or psychic situation of the character” (476). The trees in the collection are often reflective of the characters’ hidden thoughts and desires. In “Drink,” Tom Foster gets drunk for the first time in his life and reveals his genuine view of himself, using the metaphor that Helen

White “was a flame dancing in the air and he was a little tree without leaves standing out sharply against the sky” (120). Tom comparing himself to a little tree without leaves suggests that in the presence of Helen he views himself as a young boy without any growth. The lack of leaves symbolizes a lack of potential for growth, just as in the relationships of Belle and George and Elizabeth and the traveling men. He sees himself as a little tree without leaves because he feels small in her overwhelming presence and understands their connection will never develop. While in love with Helen, Tom’s existence contradicts the very implication his last name entails. Helen is unable to foster growth within Tom because they are so unevenly matched. Tom believes Helen is “a wind, a strong terrible wind, coming out of the darkness of a stormy sea and that he was a boat left on the shore of the sea by a fisherman” (120). Through the imagery of a barren tree and abandoned boat, Tom is able to capture the fruitlessness of his affections for Helen and her inability to nurture.

In a divergence from the tree metaphor that presents a stunted Tom, the tree imagery surrounding George in the final short story of the collection shows his bright and blooming future in the setting of his departure from the town: “It was April and the young tree leaves were just coming out of their buds. The trees along the residence streets in Winesburg are maple and the seeds are winged. When the wind blows they whirl crazily about, filling the air and making a carpet underfoot” (136). It is no coincidence that George’s departure takes place at the beginning of spring. Spring means new life and new beginnings, and George is beginning a new chapter in his life. Marilyn Judith Atlas writes, “The last image the reader has of George is one of ascension. He is boarding a train that will take him away from his home town and ideally toward further understanding of himself” (250-51). Just as the young tree leaves are coming out of their buds, George is young again and blossoming. He is no longer under the impression that he

understands the world—the world outside of Winesburg is new to him. The trees are described as young, suggesting a new beginning as George leaves behind comfort and familiarity. He will start over like a child and learn how to cope with the new world in learning to understand himself.

In this scene of departure, Anderson describes the maple trees that line the residence streets with their winged seeds that blow in the wind. According to Dietz, the maple tree symbolically means “reserve,” which can have a twofold meaning (16). In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reserve as an adjective means, “Avoidance of plain speaking or openness; reticence; circumspection or discretion in speech or writing” (n.p.). Up until this point in the novel, George has had an issue with speaking openly and being open with other people, even though his job as a newspaper writer requires him to. Ann R. Morris writes that, “in ‘An Awakening’ he [George] had felt himself ‘oddly detached and apart from all life,’ in ‘Sophistication,’ he wants ‘to come close to some other human, touch someone with his hands’” (55). The departure scene describes the wind blowing the maple leaves away, suggesting an end to George’s reservations about intimacy and openness. In leaving Winesburg, he is committing himself to a life as a writer who speaks plainly. If the old writer in the first story of the collection, “The Book of the Grotesque,” is George in the future, then he has maintained his career and is unafraid to speak openly to the carpenter about the truths of the world. But according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reserve as a noun means a “location or area reserved for a particular use or purpose, esp. as the property or place of abode of a particular person or group of people” (n.p.). The maple trees line the residence streets of Winesburg, suggesting the town is symbolically an area reserved for George. Even though he is physically leaving the town, he will always be able to return to it in memory to

remind him of why he left, which reflects the very nature of the short-story cycle itself: the ability to return to the beginning.

Over the course of *Winesburg, Ohio*, George Willard has transformed from a childishly confident boy into the sophisticated artist figure of the old writer. In “The Book of the Grotesques,” the old writer hires a carpenter because “The windows of the house in which he lived were high and he wanted to look at the trees when he awoke in the morning” (5). Even decades later, George wants to be able to look out of his window to the trees and remember the trees he walked beneath in his years spent in Winesburg. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, trees reveal the deepest inherent qualities of every character’s thoughts, feelings, and desires, and through a close examination of Anderson’s usage of trees in the collection, there is much to learn and observe. The characters’ positions in relation to a tree works symbolically to reflect the true nature of the relationships that take place beneath them and the genuine essence of the people themselves. Beneath the trees, characters are able to escape from the unpleasant realities of the world and search for happiness. The darkness and shadows of the trees reflect a relationship’s inability to prosper. George, harkening back to the wisdom of Doctor Reefy, will leave to find his true desires, even if it means abandoning the safety of the familiar for the ambiguity of the uncertain reality of the world.

CHAPTER 4

ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *IN OUR TIME*

Over the course of his life, Ernest Hemingway produced nine novels and almost fifty short stories, often returning to one character: Nick Adams. *In Our Time*, the only short-story cycle produced by Hemingway, features stories from Nick's childhood, as well as stories from after his service in the army. As a child, Nick is frequently depicted in nature as he comes of age and begins to learn the darker reality of the world around him. Upon returning home from war, Nick is haunted by the atrocities he witnessed and returns to the woods in the hopes of finding a sense of solace. The physical description of trees throughout the cycle and their specific breeds add greater insight into the true nature of the characters, while trees as a collective become Nick's place of comfort and where he hopes to learn how to become strong "in the broken places" (*A Farewell to Arms* 249).

The first of the Nick Adams stories in the cycle, "Indian Camp," follows a young Nick as he encounters his first case of violence. Nick's father, a doctor, brings Nick along as he heads to an Indian Camp to help a Native American woman who has been in labor for three days, but instead of a routine birth, Nick ends up witnessing a primitive Caesarean section and the suicide of her husband. The effect of this scene on Nick is reflected in the descriptions of the woods. After first landing on the island, "they went into the woods and followed a trail that led to the logging road that ran back into the hills. It was much lighter on the logging road as the timber was cut away on both sides" (15). Nick and his father begin in dense woods, but as they get closer to the camp and, therefore, closer to his formative experience, the trail is no longer lined with trees. To begin his transformation into adulthood, Nick must leave behind the comfort of the woods.

Though the experience undoubtedly affects the impressionable Nick, he still maintains

his innocence. As he and his father row back home, Nick reflects that in “the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die” (19). Although Nick is sitting in the stern of the boat—the normal position for the navigator—it is his father who rows the boat. Joseph Defalco argues, “Hemingway illustrates the compelling tendency to revert to the state of naïve innocence once the first contact with forces outside the protected environment has been made” (27). After witnessing the trauma at the Indian camp, he looks out over the landscape and naively believes he will not die. In a world filled with suffering, nature, however—and especially trees—will always provide a haven for Nick where he can once again feel solace.

In “The Doctor and The Doctor’s Wife,” the symbolism of trees reveals more about the character of not only Nick, but his father as well. Nick’s father discovers and plans to take “four big beech logs lying almost buried in the sand” that were left behind by steamers (23). But Nick’s father leaves the beech logs behind after he is accused of stealing by Dick Boulton and returns home to his wife. When he enters, Nick’s mother is lying with “the blinds drawn” and as he tries to find comfort cleaning his shotgun, he hears “his wife’s voice from the darkened room” as she makes it clear she believes the argument with Dick is her husband’s fault (25, 26). The darkness highlights the separation between Nick’s father and mother and her unwillingness to show consideration for her husband. According to Fred Hageneder, the beech tree symbolizes “[u]nderstanding, sustenance, and preservation” (89). The beech driftwood reflects the father’s desire for a sense of self-understanding in relation to these men and his wife, but as his abandonment of the logs indicates, he will never receive the compassion he longs for from his wife.

Feeling dejected after the conversation with his wife, Nick’s father turns to his source of

happiness: Nick. He walks “along the path into the hemlock woods” and finds “Nick sitting with his back against a tree, reading” (27). His father relays to Nick that his mother wishes to see him, but Nick chooses to stay with his father instead and show him “where there’s black squirrels” (27). Nick is significantly depicted amongst hemlocks, which are trees that symbolize protection and healing because of their “edible and medicinal qualities” (*Druid Garden*). As his father is a doctor, Nick has already seemingly made his choice before his father even arrives by retreating into woods associated with healing. Defalco similarly analyzes the relationship of the doctor and Nick in this scene and argues, “Now it is Nick who is to be the guide, and significantly it is to the woods that they are to go. Symbolically, the journey is toward experience, not retreat to the womb of mother” (39). Beyond a sense of healing, the woods provide Nick with experience, and so he chooses to go further into the woods and, therefore, towards experience rather than returning to his mother to be “smothered by her protective nature” (39). It is with his father that Nick first gains experience within the woods of “Indian Camp,” and when given the choice between innocence and experience, he willingly moves further away from innocence because of the protection his father’s presence affords him. In this scene, the specific tree breed highlights the sense of protection Nick feels with his father, as well as his search for experience within the woods.

As a result of deforestation, the woods can no longer offer protection for Nick in “The End of Something.” The story follows Nick and Marjorie, his girlfriend, as they fish for rainbow trout. They row along the shore of Hortons Bay, a town that thrived off the lumber business, and see the ruins of the old mill. When the lumber enterprise depleted the town’s source of lumber, the mill shut down, and the “sails of the schooner filled and it moved out into the open lake, carrying with it everything that had made the mill a mill and Hortons Bay a town” (31). Without

the trees, the town appears to lose its very essence, which is mirrored by Nick. The descriptions of Nick and his dialogue in this story present him with a changed demeanor, showing him more reserved as he interacts with Marjorie. In the previous story, he is resolute with his father, choosing to go with him and look for squirrels, but with Marjorie, Nick responds to her questions indecisively with “sure” and “I don’t know” until he finally admits their relationship “isn’t fun anymore” (33-34). Nick knows something is missing, but despite his attempts, he cannot understand what it is—ultimately leading to the downfall of his relationship. But disaster is immediately foreshadowed for the couple through the failure of the logging town, which Lisa Tyler affirms: “the demise of Hortons Bay as a logging town establishes an implicit parallel with the romantic breakup at the heart of the story” (61). The town originally flourished when its logging companies began cutting down trees from the surrounding woods, before ultimately causing the town’s ruin by harvesting too many trees. This situation parallels Nick’s rejection of Marjorie out of fear of commitment and marriage. Nick and Marjorie were happy throughout their relationship but this abundance of happiness incites him to fear their likely impending marriage and so he causes the demise of his own relationship. Just as the town has lost a crucial part of itself, so, too, has Nick temporarily lost the ability to commit.

Before ending his relationship with Marjorie, Nick’s behavior and interactions with nature further emphasize his feelings of uncertainty. Initially, Nick acts like the leader in their relationship as he directs the boat while she fishes over the side. After navigating onto the shore, Nick corrects Marjorie’s gutting technique: “You don’t want to take the ventral fin out...It’ll be all right for bait but it’s better with the ventral fin in” (32). But as they begin fishing, Nick sets “a heavy slab of driftwood across the butt of the rod to hold it solid and prop[s] it up at an angle with a small slab” (33). Nick is shown in association with driftwood, which is defined as, “Wood

floating on, or cast ashore by, the water” (*OED*). The driftwood offers literal support for him as he fishes, but it also suggests Nick’s shift towards passivity. Like driftwood that must bend to the will of the water, Nick is floating along the river, without any real willpower of his own. As he sits passively on the shore, Marjorie begins to display independence and rows the boat out on her own to fish. Nick shows again the effects of his parents’ marriage as he mirrors his father, who showed little assertiveness in his interactions with his wife, allowing her to control their marriage as the sea determines the path of the driftwood. In his first real relationship, Nick falls into the patterns displayed by his parents throughout his childhood and like both his father and the driftwood, he takes on a passive role while ending his relationship with Marjorie.

Nevertheless, the wisdom Nick gains from his father’s unhappiness and his own experiences within the woods becomes apparent as he gets closer to ending the relationship with Marjorie. Just as his father leaves behind his wife for the healing nature of the woods, so, too, does Nick gain comfort from the woods as he sits down upon a blanket with Marjorie, and in “back of them was the close second-growth timber of the point and in front was the bay with the mouth of Hortons Creek” (33). The trees are notably described not behind them, but in “back of them,” which suggests they are acting as a support for Nick. They are also described as “*close* second-growth timber,” implying that the woods are not yet fully regrown and matured, just as Nick has not yet grown into full understanding of the sacrifice and complications of marriage (33; emphasis added). Instead of facing these complications, Nick chooses to end the relationship in favor of his friendship with Bill, which Joseph Flora argues represents the “safer world of male camaraderie” (30). In each of the preceding stories, Nick aligns himself with his father, who offers a degree of protection from adulthood while also exemplifying the trials of an unsuccessful marriage. Now that Nick and Marjorie’s relationship “isn’t fun anymore” (34) and

threatens to become a serious relationship beyond a childhood fling, he reverts to what he knows—male companionship. As the descriptions of the trees suggest, Nick has not reached maturity, and he is ultimately unable to make a serious commitment to Marjorie, preferring the less demanding bonds of male friendship, emphasized by his friend Bill's appearance in the final scene of the story. His current disillusionment regarding love is in part due to his own parents' unhappy marriage, as is accentuated by the story's placement in the cycle immediately following "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife."

In "The Three-Day Blow," the trees reveal Nick's underlying unhappiness over the break-up with Marjorie. The story opens with descriptions of the landscape surrounding the cabin: "The rain stopped as Nick turned into the road that went up through the orchard. The fruit has been picked and the fall wind blew through the bare trees" (39). Teodora Domotor reads this scene as a portrayal of "an optimistic, dream-like future. The rain, which has stopped, assists in bearing fruits. This notion signifies a metaphorical rebirth... The sense of loss, deprivation, and gloom that characterized the previous story turns into an exaggerated form of hopefulness" (79). Domotor presents an overtly optimistic reading of the story, but a deeper analysis of the descriptions of the orchard reveals Nick's internal unhappiness. The fruit is all picked from the trees, and J.E. Cirlot proclaims that fruit "is a symbol of earthly desires" (115). Now that his relationship with Marjorie is over, the orchard is bare, suggesting Nick loses his earthly desires—namely sexual fulfilment—when he ends his relationship. The trees are also noticeably bare, which reaffirms his sense of something missing: female companionship. Nick will not be able to regain his earthly desires nor his female companionship without the rain, which notably stops as he approaches the orchard.

Nick's unhappiness and sense of loss after the breakup with Marjorie is further

emphasized in his conversation with Bill and his own comparison to trees. As the conversation progresses, Bill's apathetic attitude towards Nick's feelings for Marjorie causes Nick to despair: "All of a sudden everything was over...I don't know why it was. I couldn't help it. Just like when the three-day blows come now and rip all the leaves off the trees" (47). According to Cirlot, the leaf "is an allegory of happiness. When several leaves appear together as a motif, they represent people" (181). Without Marjorie, Nick loses a major source of happiness, and as several leaves together represent people, likening the moment of his break-up with a tree that loses its leaves reflects his latent feelings of isolation. Where before Nick could find comfort in his friendship with Bill, the apparent permanence of the end of his relationship highlights what a life without love is truly like: "The liquor had all died out of him and left him alone. Bill wasn't there...It was all gone" (47). Even without leaves or fruit, the essence of trees remains and so, too, comes the opportunity for rebirth and growth. Just like the trees, Nick has the ability to metaphorically regrow his leaves and this knowledge comes to him as Bill tries to prevent him from going back to Marjorie. Nick regains a sense of happiness and realizes, "There was not anything that was irrevocable...Nothing was finished. Nothing was ever lost" (48). Nick's own comparison to the bare trees emphasizes his eventual understanding of the cyclical nature of both trees and life itself and that with the rain, the chance to flourish comes again.

Unlike the previous stories, "The Battler" presents a mature Nick as he heads out alone into the world in a search for greater understanding and internal development. The story opens with Nick getting kicked off a train onto the tracks, and he notes, "There was water on both sides of the track, then tamarack swamp" (53). Tamarack is a breed of tree better known as larch, which symbolizes "[g]oing beyond limits" (Hageneder 120). In this first expedition out into the unfamiliar world away from his family and friends, Nick is both literally and metaphorically

going beyond the limits of childhood, which the tamarack tree reaffirms. But Nick does not fear this journey and leaves the woods with a newfound sense of solace. Metaphorically significant, as Hageneder notes, the tamarack's "essence balances heart and mind, will and desire" (120). As he continues, Nick remembers the "swamp was all the same on both sides of the track" (54). Nick is surrounded on both sides by trees that bring balance and support for humans, which adds to his sense of comfort within nature as he enters the campsite of Bugs and Ad Francis. Mirroring the role of the swamp, William Bache asserts the campfire scene "divides the world into 'kid things—naivete, friendliness, candor—and adult things—cruelty, deception, hypocrisy'" (qtd. in Smith 119). As Nick enters the camp, he gains a better understanding of the unfamiliar world beyond the protection of his family and friends. Nick's first experience within this world is less jarring because he feels supported by the surrounding tamarack swamp. In "Big-Hearted River: Part Two," Nick is searching for comfort within nature after the war and encounters a swamp as well, but it is instead filled with cedar trees and Nick is notably unable to bring himself to walk within it. In this story, however, he is content as he walks this road surrounded by the swamp, which highlights the difference in his level of comfort within the world both before and after his harsh experiences of war.

Beyond the symbolism of the swamp, the physical descriptions of Nick himself reflect his openness to experiencing the truth of the world. After landing on the railroad track, Nick "felt of his knee. The pants were torn and the skin was barked" (53). Nick is now physically characterized like a tree with the adjective "barked," which is defined as, "Stripped of its bark; *transf.* having the skin grazed or scraped off" (*OED*). Bark protects the core of trees from the harshness of the world, and without the bark, the fragile inside is left exposed. Now that he is grown, Nick is ready to face the harsh realities of the world, and metaphorically, his protective

layer is removed, leaving him open to deeper understanding before as he nears the woods. When the road ends, Nick cuts “into the woods to come up to the fire through the trees. It was a beechwood forest and the fallen beechnut burrs were under his shoes as he walked between the trees. The fire was bright now, just at the edge of the trees” (54). Fire serves to illuminate the woods and foreshadows Nick’s first brush with an experience away from his familiar spaces, as it symbolizes a “test of faith or innocence” (Hall, 121). In the woods, Nick meets Ad Francis, a former champion fighter, and Bugs, the ex-convict traveling companion of Ad. Bugs and Ad present a different kind of man than Nick has previously encountered, and within the woods, gathered around the campfire, he is, as Paul Smith argues, “initiat[ed] into a world where men are beaten and deformed and finally driven crazy” (119). This is the first time he has ventured beyond his hometown, and these two men are significantly different from his only model of masculinity thus far, his father. The landscape surrounding Nick’s venture into the woods highlights his loss of innocence and his journey toward internal development.

Nick’s journey to emotional maturity culminates in “Cross-Country Snow.” In this story, Nick is coming to terms with the recent news that his girlfriend, Helen, is pregnant. Nick is not excited about his impending fatherhood, but his short, generic responses to the questions of George, his skiing buddy, suggest a resignation to and acceptance of his impending role:

“Are you glad?”

“Yes. Now.”

“Will you go back to the states?”

“I guess so.”

“Do you want to?”

“No” (111).

In this scene, Nick displays a maturity previously unseen in *In Our Time*. Though he does not wish to leave Europe and return to the United States, he agrees to for the sake of his unborn child. Nick's internal development is reflected in the description of the trees that surround him and George as they descend the mountain: "They thrust bent-kneed along the road into a pine forest...Through the woods they could see a long, low-eaved, weather-beaten building. Through the trees it was a faded yellow" (108). Through the pine trees, the building appears faded yellow to Nick. According to Ellen Conroy in *The Symbolism of Colour*, "yellow was said to be the color of unity, unity of affection, unity with the spiritual powers of the universe, unity with the Sun of Righteousness who comes with healing in his wings" (14). Nick sees the yellow as faded because he is trying to embrace, but has not yet entirely embraced, the shift in his level of responsibility in his relationship with Helen. But when Nick walks through the pine trees, which Theresa Dietz asserts symbolizes "boldness; courage; daring; endurance; hope" (224) and emerges on the other side, he realizes "[c]loser the window frames were painted green. The paint was peeling" (108-109). The pine trees suggest Nick's inspiration to be bold and have the courage to accept his role as a father, which is reflected in the peeling green paint of the window panes. Conroy argues that the color green "is the color of all that is fresh and young and joyous" (21). The shift in Nick's perception from faded yellow to peeling green suggests his own change. He is shedding his youth and becoming a mature man who, as Olivia Carr Edenfield states, sees "that accepting responsibility for his actions will enable him to move forward" (142), demonstrated, as she argues, by his ability to successfully navigate his new terrain.

The final story, "Big Two-Hearted River," completes the cycle and looks back to the beginning by depicting Nick, damaged by his experiences in the war, seeking out the woods as a source of comfort just as he did in his childhood in the earlier stories, especially "Indian Camp"

and “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife.” The story opens with descriptions of the landscape and Seney, a town which was destroyed by a fire along with many of the surrounding trees: “Seney was burned, the country was burned over and changed, but it did not matter. It could not all be burned. He knew that” (135). Nick takes comfort in this sentiment because he, too, is damaged, but he will not allow his trauma to consume him. Instead of suffering from the memories of war, Nick continues up the hillside until he reaches the top: “Ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain. The burned country stopped off at the left with the range of hills” (135). The resistance of the pine plain to the fire emphasizes the endurance of nature and Nick’s own perseverance. The image of the pine furthers this reading, as, according to Hageneder, the pine symbolizes “[v]itality and continuity” (149). Nick struggles to feel strong after the war and seeks out the woods to regain a sense of vitality. In the woods, Nick adheres to the rituals passed down from his father in an attempt to learn how to live “in the broken places” (*A Farewell to Arms* 249).

Nick decides to make camp in a plain of pine trees: “The branches were high above. Some interlocked to make a solid shadow on the brown forest floor. Around the grove of trees was bare space. It was brown and soft underfoot as Nick walked on it. This was the over-lapping of the pine-needle floor, extending out beyond the width of the high branches” (137). It is fitting that Nick chooses to make camp in the shadows beneath the pines as, according to Jane Gifford, the Pine tree advises us to “cleanse ourselves of negativity, neither dwelling on mistakes nor apportioning blame” (148). After the trauma of war, Nick finds peace and is able to sleep beneath the pines because they free him from the horrors associated with war. Beneath the pines, he goes through the ritual of setting up his tent, which reinforces Flora’s argument that the “ritualistic aspects underscore the metaphysical dimension to the longing for order” (52). Nick

begins the ritual by setting up his tent: “With the ax he slit off a bright slab of pine from one of the stumps and split it into the pegs for the tent. He wanted them long and solid to hold in the ground” (138). By using the pine tree as stakes for his tent, Nick is literally grounding himself in nature. When faced with trauma, Nick repeatedly turns to nature as his coping mechanism and each time he interacts with the woods, he returns to a state of happiness, even if only briefly.

Nick’s internal state is further revealed by the specific breed of trees. As Nick fishes, he looks around and sees “a great elm uprooted. Gone over in a storm, it lay back into the woods, its roots clotted with dirt, grass growing in them, rising a solid bank beside the stream” (151). The elm tree represents “[c]ommunication and relationships,” but the elm Nick sees is uprooted, which reflects a disturbance in his ability to communicate and maintain relationships (210). After the war, Nick’s ability to communicate is lessened even more by the horrors he witnessed. Nick struggles to ease the burden of his experiences by speaking about these painful memories and it is for this reason that he searches for comfort within the woods. But Nick does not perceive all of the landscape as friendly; the swamp acts as a reminder of the harsh memories of the war he is avoiding, as confirmed by William Adair: “The marshes of the Portogrande region where Cantwell and Nick fought during that winter of 1917-18, the swampy region that lies downstream of the Piave River and near the shores of the Adriatic, is paralleled by the swamp that lies downstream of the Big Two-Hearted River” (148). Unlike the simple swamp of “The Battler,” the swamp in “Big Two-Hearted River” is more complicated with several breeds of trees described in relation to it. Nick first notes the “birch trees in the green of the swamp on the other side of the river” (145). According to Hageneder, the birch represents “[r]enewal and protection” (43). The swamp reminds Nick of the horrors he encountered in war, while the birch, which grows only in the green, prosperous boundary of the swamp, offers him protection from

these painful recollections. Nevertheless, within the swamp, “the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic” (155). Hageneder asserts that the cedar symbolizes “[w]isdom and strength,” which Nick does not yet have to face the memories of his trauma (58).

Nick’s inability to face the trauma of his past is further emphasized by the difference in the descriptions of the trees. As Hemingway proclaims in *A Moveable Feast*, the “story was about coming back from the war but there was no mention of the war in it” (76). In the landscape that surrounds him, Nick sees the effects of the war. Within the cedar swamp, almost no sunlight can shine through, but in the pine plain the “trees had grown tall and the branches moved high, leaving in the sun this bare space they had once covered with shadow” (137). The sunlight, and lack thereof, highlight the fear Nick has at the idea of facing his memories of war. Instead of confronting his trauma, the purpose of Nick’s venture into the woods is, as Michelle Balaev argues, to focus “on the matter of making a home by the river and finding a ‘good’ place in the world where the self is renewed by interacting with nature” (108). But Nick will not avoid the swamp and, by extension, his past indefinitely, as his final line reveals, there “were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp” (156).

In Our Time depicts Nick Adams’ transition from childhood into adulthood as he experiences significant moments of violence, which reveal the unpleasant truths of the world. Only by escaping into the woods can he learn to cope, and by closely examining the specific trees he connects with, the true nature of Nick is revealed. In the end, Hemingway’s collection reflects the shared connection between all humans struggling to cope with trauma. As Hemingway famously wrote in his novel *A Farewell to Arms*, “The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places. But those that will not break, it kills. It kills the

very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially” (249). Like *A Farewell to Arms*, *In Our Time* reinforces this struggle to continue on through the harsh realities of the world.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Much like Ernest Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory," an author's unique insight can be better understood by attempting to discern the purpose of each detail included in a piece of writing. By closely examining the physical description of trees and their breeds, as well as their interconnection with characters, readers develop a better understanding of the nuances of these characters and their personalities, shortcomings, and so much more. Analyzing the role of trees in Freeman's *Six Trees* reveals what the characters were missing from their lives and uncovers their manifest desires, while also acting as the catalyst for change in their conduct and demeanor. The symbolism of trees in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* better illuminates the reason for the failure of Belle and George Willard's relationship, that Seth's feelings for Helen are built upon a fantasy, and the change in George's inherent nature at the end of the cycle. Finally, in Hemingway's *In Our Time*, trees express Nick Adams' struggle to connect with others and his battle to overcome the trauma from his time serving in the war, all while acting as a coping mechanism for Nick as he tries to find solace in a post-war world he does not recognize. A close examination of these trees and their specific breeds reveal many of the important subtleties that would otherwise be overlooked.

But a close connection between tree and character is an image repeated in many more works of American literature than those examined in this thesis. The true merit of my research lies in its ability to be applied to a myriad of literary works. Just as both specific breeds of trees and trees as a collective reveal the change in George's disposition towards leaving and his unhappiness with life in the small town in *Winesburg, Ohio*, understanding the significance of trees will unveil deeper, important information about the true nature of characters and their interactions in other works of literature as well. For example, in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good

Man is Hard to Find,” the family begins their final road trip with the description: “The trees were full of silver-white sunlight, and the meanest of them sparkled. The children were reading comic magazines and their mother had gone back to sleep” (139). In this beginning scene, O’Connor uses trees to highlight the moral issues of the family. The trees are beautifully illuminated by the sun and even the meanest of them is sparkling for passersby, but the children and mother take no notice of this exquisite scene and prioritize their own interests—foreshadowing the behavior that occasions their deaths. A specific breed is introduced when the family reaches The Tower, a barbecue restaurant owned by Big Sammy: “Red Sammy was lying on the bare ground outside The Tower with his head under a truck while a gray monkey about a foot high, chained to a small chinaberry tree, chattered nearby. The monkey sprang back into the tree and got on the highest limb as soon as he saw the children jump out of the car and run toward him” (140-41). The Chinaberry tree appears symbolically in notable works such as Kate Chopin’s “The Storm” and Zora Neale Hurston’s “Sweat,” and only through analyzing the works that came before “A Good Man is Hard to Find” can we understand the true significance of these tree breeds within their respective literary works and each writer’s authorial purpose.

But the significance of trees is not developed solely across the works of American literature; the plethora of symbols and metaphors popular in American literature would be nothing without the centuries of great, foreign literature that came before it. As already displayed through Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome, each literary work is influenced by all those that came before it, including myths and fables. While this thesis focuses solely on texts from the American short-story genre, I intend to expand this topic to highlight the connection of American literature and Irish literary traditions through the symbolism of trees because much of the symbolism these tree varieties cultivated over time stems from Irish mythology and folklore.

The metaphorical significance of trees is echoed throughout and built upon the literature of various cultures around the world, especially Ireland. The culture of Ireland is deeply connected to trees, as even the country's first written alphabet, *ogham*, used different breeds of trees to represent each letter. Therefore, the country is founded upon a connection to trees and the fables of Celtic mythology explain the signification of each specific tree breed for the Irish people^{vii}. Ireland's extensive mythology is detailed in four texts, the Mythology, Ulster, Fenian, and Historical cycles, written between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries as the Gaels arrived in the country, which highlights how deeply rooted tree lore is in Irish literature. Popular myths include The Guardians of the Five Provinces, in which the five, ancient leaders of the Irish provinces were each presented with a different native, fruit-bearing tree, and Fairy Trees, which citizens believed were magical portals to the fairy world.

These extensive myths about the breeds of Ireland not only continue to influence contemporary Irish writers, but authors around the world. As Fred Hageneder discusses in *The Meaning of Trees* and Jane Gifford displays in *The Wisdom of Trees*, the figurative meaning of many tree species stem from these Irish cultural myths, which merits further examination into how these accepted meanings influence not only American literature, but Irish works as well. One important Irish, Modernist work^{viii} is Kate O'Brien's *Without My Cloak*, which follows three generations of an Irish family, with many of its members retreating to the garden or scenes of nature in times of hardship or personal crisis. The importance of analyzing trees in literature in light of other cultures and environments cannot be understated. Researching the influence of trees on other cultures not only allows readers to better understand the significations of each breed, but it enables a more comprehensive reading of important literary works—the benefits of which are priceless and incalculable.

NOTES

ⁱ Jennifer J. Smith's *The American Short Story Cycle* further expounds on the beliefs of several critics about the designation and moniker of any collective work of short stories.

ⁱⁱ Author of *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*

ⁱⁱⁱ Author of *The Short Story Cycle*

^{iv} According to Michael Ferber, "Elm and vine together stand for husband and wife" (69).

^v In *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Michael Ferber discusses the Elm's role in connection to vines in the works of Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Tennyson.

^{vi} Critics have debated whether Sherwood Anderson was influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud. For further insight into the debate, Frederick J. Hoffman's *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* and William M. Etter's "Speaking of Manhood in *Winesburg, Ohio*" provide incisive arguments against the connection of Freud and Anderson, while Belinda Bruner's "Masturbating and Missing Something," Ralph Ciancio's "'The Sweetness of the Twisted Apples': Unity of Vision in *Winesburg, Ohio*," and Rosemary M. Laughlin's "Godliness and the American Dream in *Winesburg, Ohio*" deliver a compelling opposition.

^{vii} For more information regarding the folklore of Celtic mythology and the significance of trees, Niall Mac Coitir's book *Ireland's Trees: Myths, Legends, and Folklore* has detailed information about the sacredness of trees in Irish culture as a whole, as well as the sanctity of Irish tree varieties.

^{viii} A valuable reference text for Modern Irish literature is *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*, edited by Joe Cleary. This work introduces readers to countless valuable authors forgotten in the shadows of Samuel Beckett, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce.

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