

The 'Internal Tree:' Arboreal Symbols in Ali Smith's *Autumn*



Aylín Esmeralda García Hernández

ORCID: 0009-0006-6375-1874

University of La Laguna

Abstract

Following the publishing of *Autumn* (2016), Scottish author Ali Smith has received both international acclaim as well as negative reviews for it supposedly being a collage of seemingly unrelated subjects. This paper challenges such a view by providing insight into one of its hidden meanings – the arboreal symbols – paying attention to the concept of 'Internal Tree' as coined by J.R.R. Tolkien and which resembles the way in which other well-known authors including Smith have explored the topics of authorship and literature. I will study the origins of these symbols as a trope and examine how the 'Internal Tree' allows authors' development and connection with past, present and future writers while remaining attached to their roots. Both aspects will be briefly traced from the work of Classical authors, the Bible and Anglophone literature, and analysed in Ali Smith's *Autumn* and a number of her previous works.

Key words

Ali Smith, Autumn, Arboreal Symbolism, Brexit Fiction, Contemporary British Authors, Literary Tropes

Introduction

Scottish author Ali Smith published her novel *Autumn* in 2016 and since then, it has been widely studied and commented on by scholars and reviewers. There are those who have seen this narrative as a start to the so-called BrexLit and have praised its accomplishments (Shaw 2018, 20-23; Einhaus 2018, 165). Even so, McAlpin has considered this narrative to be “less structurally complex than *How to be Both*” and have particularly argued that it “knits together an astonishing array of seemingly disparate subjects” (2017). O'Brien wonders likewise “Who is Smith trying to convince here? Because in many, rather unsatisfying ways, despite Smith’s undeniable skill, *Autumn* is gestational, even tangled, unsure of its position” (2017). These opinions, however, appear to disregard Smith's frequent assertion that “stories– like onions [...] are layered, stratified constructs” or that “We'd never expect to understand a piece of music on one listen, but we tend to believe we've read a book after reading it just once” (“How should” 2012; Cohen 2013). She consistently articulates the idea that narratives should be considered as complex nets of interrelations and finds fault with

the current tendency to oversimplify “that makes us expect simple solutions, closure, a beginning, middle and an end. It doesn't fit us for experiment or risk” (Winterson 2003, 2). Smith dismisses thus the possibility that any of the topics in her works are included without a predefined objective.

One of the aspects in those layers which contributes to the endless connections present in this narrative is its arboreal symbolism. Symbols have been considered by scholars like Juan Eduardo Cirlot as a tool which links the material with the transcendental. In other words, it provides unity and meaning where we would otherwise only see disconnection and chaos (2001, xiii). In the matter at hand, existing relations between books and trees are not a recent discovery. Traditionally, books have been made from raw materials extracted from trees what would explain why the root of the word “book” is suspected to share the same base as “beech” which is not only the name of a tree species but does also refer to wooden material for writing (OED online 2023). Among the significant authors studying these connections there stands John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, better known as J.R.R. Tolkien, who first mentions the term 'Internal Tree' in his personal correspondence, when he experienced a mental block while writing *The Lord of the Rings* (1968). Then, he consciously refers to his novel as a tree whose growth is influenced by external conditions, in this case, World War II. He also talks about it “throwing unexpected branches” or creating unforeseen associations. This is especially remarkable as Margaret Atwood – without explicitly using this expression – talks in similar terms about her work, asserting that a writer “can branch out in all kinds of different directions, but that doesn't mean cutting yourself off from your roots and from your earth” (Jensen 2016, 7; 100). Even if narratives are occasionally analysed as independent units, both Tolkien and Atwood seem to be aware of having been shaped by their origins, times, life experiences and other authors. Jensen compares this matter to the study of tree rings or dendrochronology since trees as well as literature are affected by external conditions (5-12). This influence of previous authors is akin to the origins of arboreal symbols which trace us back to the psychological features and material wealth inherited from our ancestors. Subsequently, I will explore these issues by providing in each case examples from Anglophone literature and Ali Smith's *Autumn*.

1. Arboreal symbolism

1.1. Origins'

Trees are connected to the emergence of the first human settlements. Prior to that stage, individuals were mostly nomadic, they planted and harvested crops in the same year, making their attachment to land limited. However, the beginning of the cultivation of fruit trees before 3,000 B.C. changed this disposition. Trees, as Russell explains “may go on producing for decades, and anyone who has planted a fruit-tree has a valuable and durable piece of capital, in which he takes a continued interest,

constantly visiting it to care for and harvest it” (1979, 221). This was one of the reasons for settling on a particular place and the establishment of a means of successfully proving kinship and, thus, the right to inheritance. This new lifestyle provided by itself the method for identifying the true descendants of a given family. In other words, it was not until “domesticated animals were bred under controlled conditions that the further discovery was made, that one particular male is responsible for each birth” (Russell 222).

These considerations furnished literature with a series of arboreal symbols. As Chevalier and Gheerbrant state, trees are regarded as symbols of the life cycle as they undergo the same changes as humans: birth, maturation, death and transformation. Likewise, both the *Genesis* and the *Koran* liken their growth to that of plants (1996, 1049-62). It is understandable then the frequent comparison of falling leaves with the end of life, as happens in “Oft, in the Stilly Night” by Thomas Moore: “The friends, so link’d together, / I’ve seen around me fall, / Like leaves in wintry weather” (1841, 167). The different generations succeeding one another could be equated to the changes in foliage in deciduous trees. The only real way in which living beings, including humans, may be said to obtain a modicum of immortality. Russell suggests that the biblical Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden symbolised this revelation, God's reason for fearing that it could lead Adam to the Tree of Life and, consequently, to eternal life. It is hardly surprising the leaves of the latter are said to be evergreen as a portrayal eternal life in Milton's *Paradise Regain'd* (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1028; 223; Steadman 1960, 385).

1.2. Kinship and cyclical time

An ever-increasing relation between kinship and trees was created resulting, firstly, from the decomposition of human bodies which serves as nourishment for plants, in the words of Zamir: “burial is thus on some irreducible level a distorted form of planting” (2011, 443). And, secondly, deriving from the tradition of planting trees upon the graves of ancestors. This symbolism can be found in the story of Tristan and Iseult or the Irish tale of Deirdre and Naoise, where plants or trees grow from the graves of the ill-fated lovers. This way, the World Tree emerged connecting the world of the living, associated with its trunk, with Heaven – thanks to its branches– and is rooted in the Underworld (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1027-28; Cirlot lii; Russell 225-26). Similarly, in Virgil's the *Aeneid*, Aeneas's uprooting of the trees or bushes placed upon the Trojan Polydorous's grave has been interpreted as the removal of any possible competitors to his lineage (Gowers 2011, 88-104). The metaphoric use of trees as ancestors is also found in *The Lord of the Rings* where Treebeard, the eldest living creature upon the Middle-earth, is described as a tree-like figure. The word 'ent' has an Anglo-Saxon origin meaning “giant” or “mighty person of long ago” and Tolkien,

who was a professor of philology at Oxford, acknowledged that these characters “grew rather out of their name, than the other way about” (Jensen 40-41).

These underlying meanings play a relevant part in Ali Smith's *Autumn* and happen particularly in relation to one of its characters, namely, Daniel Gluck. This does not seem to be a fortuitous comparison as he is the oldest character in the novel – actually, he is a hundred and one – and thus, the closest to the end of the life cycle: “Daniel Gluck looks from the death to the life, then back to the death again” (2017, 13). He is in an “increasing sleep period” in a care home where he dreams that he is inside a Scots pine and this is clearly linked to cyclical time:

Cut this tree I'm living in down. Hollow its trunk out.
Make me all over again, with what you scooped out of its insides.
Slide the new me inside the old trunk.
Burn me. Burn the tree. Spread the ashes, for luck, where you want next year's crops
to grow.
Birth me all over again. (102)

This narrative continues to stress cycles by talking about the different seasons: “The seasons pass [...] there's nothing left of them [...] but bones in grass, bones in flowers, the leafy branches of the ash tree above them” or in the form of relationships between different generations whether they are acquaintances: “It's supposed to be someone who's a neighbour *right now* [...] And I'm supposed to ask [...] what life was like when the neighbour was my age” (127; 44), or actual relatives: “The blown-up real photographs of her grandmother and grandfather from when her mother was small. The ones of her mother when her mother was a baby. The ones of herself as a baby” (44). The inheritance of traits from the parents is emphasised several times: “Oh, you don't want to go to college, Daniel said. I do, Elisabeth said. My mother was the first in my family ever to go, and I will be the next” or “your girl's a powerhouse, Zoe says. Isn't she. But never underestimate the source, her mother says. The source? Elisabeth says. Me, her mother says” (71; 238). Additionally, Daniel's first appearance in the opening chapter takes place in an Eden-like setting whose description involves a series of arboreal references, which remind us of the importance of arboreal symbolism in the *Genesis*:

He must be dead, he is surely dead, because his body looks different from the last time he looked down at it [...] very like his own body but back when it was young [...]
He had forgotten there is a physicality in not wanting to offend [...] He will make a green suit for himself out of leaves. (6-8)

1.3. Trees as hermaphrodite ancestors

The link between the cultivation of fruit trees and the need for the corroboration of true heirs has been a source for the identification of maternity with these varieties of trees. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, their production of fruit once a year, hollow trunk or foliage which shelters small animals like birds in their nests have favoured associations with maternity and femininity (1030-31). A case in point is William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where Lady Macbeth asking to be unsexed in the first act has been understood as the confirmation of her infertility. Nature, therefore, has failed her and that is why she goes against natural laws by conspiring to commit murder. The walking forest of Birman becomes, according to Harrison, an embodiment of natural justice whereas its movement could symbolise “the limitless proliferation of fertile and onward-marching heirs, the ultimate dread of the aspiring dynast” (1992, 102-104; Russell 224). Another example is Washington Irving's “Sleepy Hollow,” where the daughter of a rich Dutch farmer is described as “ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches” when the main character, Ichabod Crane, is picturing themselves “with a whole family of children.” (1983, 1065-78). Joseph the Hymnographer also captures this notion in one of his works where he “praises Mary who gives birth to the sweet-smelling apple” (Kalish 2016, 143-44).

Interestingly enough, the feminine connotations overlap with the masculine ones regarding arboreal symbolism as the tree could easily be considered as a phallic symbol due to its vertical nature, sap and relation to solar power (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1030-31). Consequently, its symbolism is ambivalent and emerges as a mixture of both genders resulting in the idea of a hermaphrodite ancestor. In Smith's novel, Daniel is sometimes referred to in feminine terms “old queen, Elisabeth's mother said under her breath” and his dreaming of being inside a tree is much in line with the 'regressus ad uterum' and thus, an urge to return to the beginning of our life cycle and be united with nature: “Daniel in the bed, inside the tree, isn't panicking. He isn't even claustrophobic. It's reasonable in here.” Daniel's metamorphosis into a tree easily reminds of dryads, the female spirits of trees in Greek mythology. But the image of the tree as a phallic symbol is present as well: “the trunks of Scots pines do tend to be narrow. Straight and tall” or more explicitly “she is slipping out of her summer dress [...] Up go all his pinecones. He groans. She doesn't hear a thing” (43; 90-91). It is notable then that, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, the pine “stands for the elevation of the life force and the glorification of fertility” (755). This ambiguity is even more noticeable when he is compared to Puck, a Shakespearean character who is famously considered androgynous (113). Additionally, the pine emerges as a relevant image because of its representation of the Greek god Attis, who was initially hermaphrodite and brought to life after death (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 756, Cirlot xix-xx).

Actually, *Autumn* has an intertextual relation with a Shakespearean play that works as a summary of these hermaphrodite traits: *The Tempest*. Jensen highlights Prospero's fixation with wood when he does not only make use of Caliban but also of Ferdinand to compulsively deforest the island. The two men are a potential threat to the chastity of his daughter – Caliban tried to rape Miranda, and Ferdinand due to their incipient relationship – thus, the cutting down of trees, as these can be interpreted as a phallic symbol, is a means of protecting his only heir and avoiding the existence of an illegitimate son (16-20). In Smith's narrative, Daniel, in addition to being referred to as a tree, consciously chooses a character disguised as such when playing a game of his invention about creating a story. In this scene, there are associations with ascendants transmitting a series of values, and descendants as well. This man dressed as a tree is also interpreted as a threat to progeny:

Think what it'd be like if everyone started wearing tree costumes [...] It'd be like living in a wood. And we don't live in a wood [...] it was good enough for my parents, and my grandparents and my great grandparents [...] But if you got your way you'd be dressing our kids up as trees, dressing our women up as trees. It's got to be nipped in the bud. (125)

1.4. The tree as pillar of the community

The constant linking of trees with kinship explains the graphic interpretation of the family tree that has arrived in our times. What is more, “in Judeo-Christian tradition [the tree] is the central pillar which holds up the temple or house” (Russell 223-30, Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1027-32). In the *Song of Songs*, the beloved maintains “Our couch is green; / the beams of our house are cedar, / our rafters are pine” (*Bible*, 2001, 1.16-17). This certainly reminds us of Odysseus and Penelope's bed which was erected upon the roots of an olive tree embedded in the house foundations. Once more, a tree is at the core of the household. As a result, an analogy can be established between family and community as any family can be identified as the first long-term association among individuals and, consequently, the foundation for tribes, communities or nations. As Russell states “clan segments are naturally referred to as branches of long-lived trees” (229).

Smith's work in general and *Autumn* in particular establishes connections with her community on different fronts: the repetition of history in Western society, her Scottish roots and the interrelations inside the literary community. She has repeatedly discussed that human beings are conditioned by time and that time is cyclical, highlighting the multiple links between trees and literature. In one of her interviews, she described humans as being

time-containers, we hold all our diachrony, our pasts and our futures (and also the pasts and the futures of all the people who made us and who in turn we'll help to make) in every one of our consecutive moments/minutes/days/years, and I wonder if our real energy, our real history, is cyclic in continuance and at core, rather than consecutive. (Anderson 2018, 2-3)

She also commented that “trees are great. Don't get me started about how clever they are, how oxygen-generous, how time formed [...] Their organic relation to books” (Anderson 4). For Smith trees are “time formed” as humans, that is, influenced by their conditions, which is on par with Tolkien and Atwood's view on arboreal symbolism. And, even more so, because she also mentions “their organic relation to books,” in fact, she once asserted that “books and trees are the same thing. I think books are all interrelated. Stories are all interrelated to other stories, to other books [...] in their very form, in the way they are made” (Boddy, 2010, 71). Smith seems to be taking the helm here of Renaissance authors and, particularly, Shakespeare as at the time “the process of literary invention was [...] compared to a search for timber in the woods,” being that timber the writings of previous authors. Scholars like Jensen have seen Prospero as the embodiment of Shakespeare himself who, in drowning his book at the end of *The Tempest*, is regarding it as timber that will be used by future authors (13; 25). These authors' viewpoint about literature could definitely be summarised in the form of a tree where the roots would be the sociocultural origins and literary influences of a writer; its trunk, their authorial intent influenced by individual traits; the branches, the expected or unexpected associations with other authors or works; and, finally, the leaves, the unique characteristics in each one of the writings as the most mutable part of a tree. It is precisely this structure the one that I am going to follow to examine Ali Smith's Internal Tree in *Autumn* with comparisons to a number of her previous works.

2. Ali Smith's Internal Tree

2.1. Roots

The first aspect of her Internal Tree to be briefly analysed is her sociocultural roots. She often, and particularly in *Autumn*, alludes to Western history to provide a new perspective on current matters by emphasising the repetition of history: “It was a typically warm Monday in late September, 2015, in Nice, in the south of France [...] It was a typically warm Friday in late September 1943, in Nice, in the south of France” (Smith 63-64). These allusions have, at least, two functions: warning us about the mistakes that we are repeating as a society and offering solace through the cyclical nature of time.

Regarding her literary influences, several of them can be extracted from *Autumn* where there are intertextual references to Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Ovid¹ and others like Sylvia Plath: “Daniel says it doesn't matter how she died so long as you can still say or read her words” (79). These are authors who have greatly influenced Western literature and society, especially in Anglophone countries. They are the “timber” that other writers, like Ali Smith, employ for their works. Modernism is also one of her main sources of inspiration that has clearly affected the construction of her novels inviting the reader to play an active role in them. In a BBC podcast, she commented that “[I] loved the way they [modernists] asked of me to make a text come together even if the text seems to be in pieces [...] it just made sense to me” and how she was particularly enticed by James Joyce's experimentation (Wilson 2022).

One of the most relevant features which has impacted Smith's writings is her Scottishness. In *Autumn*, she repeatedly refers to a pine species native to Scotland: “The Scots pine doesn't need much soil depth, is remarkably good at long life, a tree that can last for many centuries” and she also talks about “the opening of the Scottish Parliament [...] Her mother who has seen it several times already herself, was in tears from the start” (90; 197). A number of traits commonly identified with Scottishness are “bravery, nobility and royalty” although sometimes they are also identified with “negative attributes like unapproachableness, rudeness, violence, or primitiveness.” It is usual to encounter stereotypes such as the use of “kilts, tartan, whisky, bagpipes.” Most of them are regarded from a masculine perspective and, according to Schwarserová and Jelínková, this has resulted in a greater invisibility of women in Scotland than in other territories (2021, 14-16; 2019, 29-30). It is not surprising then that Smith “had no expectation of *Hotel World* making the 2001 shortlist, and when it did, she didn't bother to prepare a speech because she knew it wouldn't win: ‘The gay girl from Scotland? No!’ (Winterson 2). It seems, therefore, fitting that Scottish writers who do not identify with these stereotypical features challenge them and try to create their own space in this culture. As it is defended several times throughout *Autumn*: “It depends on how you'd define normal, Elisabeth said. Which would be different from how I'd define normal” (78). And this takes me to the trunk of her Internal Tree.

2.2. Trunk

Smith's work has obviously been influenced by a great number of personal experiences but what certainly, has affected her literary work is the fact of being a homosexual woman. This together with her Scottish origins could be interpreted as a disadvantage. However, she has been able to transform this marginalisation into a resource for including the silenced voices in her narratives such as those of women,

¹ These other allusions will be studied as part of the “branches” extended to other works.

immigrants or homosexuals. The *Seasonal Quartet* brings to the fore a series of forgotten female artists like Pauline Boty in *Autumn*, whose case is presented to the reader in the following terms: “Elisabeth [...] had been having an argument with her tutor, who'd told her that categorically there had never been such a thing as a female British Pop artist” or “I bet it goes like this, Zoe says. Ignored. Lost. Rediscovered years later [...] Then ignored. Lost. Rediscovered ad infinitum. Am I right?” (150; 239). This is not the only case where she mentions other arts as the *Quartet* is characterised by the overlapping of references to different arts such as photography, painting, music and cinema.

The trunk is also a perfect representation of the unifying nature of literature, of how it includes every aspect of life and works as a space where there is room for different realities. *Autumn* shows the reader how people cannot be divided into fixed categories when Elisabeth claims that Daniel is “not *just* one thing or another. Nobody is. Not even you” (77). That “you” directed to Elisabeth’s mother, could equally be addressed to the reader. Actually, she will subsequently start a relationship with another woman: “Her mother is sitting in her new friend's lap. They've got their arms round each other like the famous Rodin statue, in the middle of the kiss” (220). This fluctuation in sexuality is also present in Elisabeth’s life when describing her love relations: “He kissed her at the school back gate [...] then Marielle Simi, who was French, put her arm round Elisabeth and kissed her [...] Tom and Elisabeth had been together for six years” (146-47). As claimed by Schwarzerová, this intends to prove that non-heteronormative sexualities are more widespread than society generally thinks and need not be considered as a negative feature (20).

Smith also contests the stereotypical characteristics which are usually applied to both genders: “I'm going to be an artist. Women don't get to be that, Beryl said. I will. A serious artist. I want to be a painter” (252). The imposition of certain “masculine” values on men is also present: “The brother who wanted to go to art school, their father made him an accountant. She got to go eventually, well, after all, not a proper job, so it was maybe more okay, for a girl” (249). In previous works, she had already displayed this concern by blurring the characters’ gender as happens in *Artful* or in *How to Be Both* from its very title (Lecomte, 2019, 41-46). But this refusal of categorisation can be seen elsewhere. In *Autumn*, she also defies how old people are commonly regarded by society: “If he was very old [...] he didn't look anything like the people who were meant to be it on TV” (46-47). Her interest in breaking conventions has also led her to the rewriting of a series of classical myths and topics treated by previous authors. This takes us to the branches of the Internal Tree, where she stretches the associations of her writings through intertextual references giving a new perspective to canonical literary works.

2.2. Ramifications

Throughout *Autumn*, she frequently alludes to the necessity of reading “What you reading? [...] Always be reading something, he said. Even when we're not physically reading. How else will we read the world? Think of it as a constant” and we are told that Daniel's sister “reads all the time, and she prefers to be reading several things at once, she says it gives endless perspective and dimension” (68; 183). These allusions to other works are truly transformed when they are seen in a new light. That is why she makes use of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* to disclose the similarities between different national crises and offer the reader solace in relation to the climate of discord generated by Brexit: “It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times. Again. That's the thing about things. They fall apart, always have, always will, it's in their nature” (3). Sometimes, this means changing the original stories:

Is my spraypaint can any more made up than the rest of the story? Daniel said.
Yes, Elisabeth said.
Then she thought about it.
Oh! she said. I mean, no.
And if I'm the storyteller I can tell it in any way I like, Daniel said. (120-21)

By underlining that narratives are constructed by a particular person with a specific set of values, Smith, following the steps of Jean François Lyotard, is warning us about the consequences of metanarratives: “Whoever makes up the story makes up the world [...] So always try to welcome people into the home of your story [...] I mean characters who seem to have no choice at all. Always give them a home” (120). That is why one of her most important literary influences is Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as her deconstruction of these myths intends to create a space both for women and queer people in literature, culture and society in general and in the Scottish one in particular. Accordingly, Smith has participated with *Girl Meets Boy* in the *Canongate Myth Series*, where authors as renowned as Atwood or Philip Pullman have retold different classical myths. She focused on the myth of Iphis, blurring once more gender categorising: “He was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen in my life. But he looks really like a girl. She was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen in my life” (2007, 44-45). This description corresponds to the moment when Robin is dressed in a Highland male costume, thus defying Scottish stereotypes.

Likewise, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* will work as a hypotext in *Autumn*: “She gets her new/old book out and opens it at its beginning: *My purpose is to tell of bodies which have been transformed into shapes of a different kind*” (112). As Zamir stated, a person metamorphosed into a tree implies that there is a “loss of agency” which also “includes degendering.” (446). This is not only seen in the case of Daniel: “Daniel Gluck taking leaf of his senses at last, his tongue a broad green leaf, leaves growing out of his eyes [...] till he's swathed in foliage, leafskin, relief” where the connection with the

image of the hermaphrodite ancestor has already been stated (181). There is also a reference to the myth of Apollo and Daphne: “Overnight, like a girl in a myth being hunted by a god who's determined to have his way with her, she has altered herself, remade herself so she can't be had by anyone” (94). In this scene, the woman's metaphorical metamorphosis into a tree seems to work as a defence against the loss of agency caused by the coercion during a trial.

2.3. Leaves

The different treatment of the same hypotext during *Girl Meets Boy* and *Autumn* leads us to the leaves of this tree which are characterised by their mutability. This is not only related to the different intertextual associations that can be established with a given hypotext in different works, it does also include the variety of literary genres which an author explores along his or her career. In Smith's case, these range from plays written for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to short story collections like *Free Love and Other Stories* and, of course, her novels. Additionally, there is a variety of topics treated in her writings. Each of the books of the *Seasonal Quartet* deals with a variety of contemporary social issues including the COVID-19 pandemic in *Summer* or our dependency on new technologies in *Autumn*:

A blank screen means [...] all the knowledge is disappearing. There'll be no way she'll be able to access her workfiles [...] There'll be no way she'll be able to do anything ever again. (203)

But this is not the only extract from *Autumn* that covers present concerns. This novel was published in 2016 during the outbreak of Brexit: “Here's an old story so new that it's still in the middle of happening, writing itself right now with no knowledge of where or how it'll end” (181). There are several extracts that reflect its consequences like the division of the country: “All across the country people felt history at their shoulder. All across the country, people felt history meant nothing” or the situation of immigrants in the UK: “She realizes she hasn't so far encountered a single care assistant here who isn't from somewhere else in the world” (60;111).

Regarding arboreal symbolism, it has been previously included in one of her works, that is, in her short story “Erosive,” an apple tree infected by ants is related to the different phases of the narrator's unrequited love for a woman. The tree is actually uprooted at one point but the story refuses to have a traditional order and at the “end” it is still planted in the protagonist's garden. This is probably a way of expressing that love has a cyclical nature and we can find love with a new person. Moreover, in “May,” the main character falls in love with a tree. There are different associations to be found in each of the novels composing the *Quartet*. Although this is even more significant in *Autumn*, the symbolism does not end there and extends

to the other narratives. Orosz-Réti highlights how trees in *Winter* seem to work as a meeting point, there is one present on Sophia and Daniel's first date and also when the former is reunited with her sister at Christmas time, as Iris arrives at her house with a magnolia tree. Orosz-Réti also observes that, in *Spring*, there is a reference to a pear tree in relation to Katherine Mansfield's short story "Bliss," where one of the characters, Richard Lease, considers it "as a counterpoint of all mundane things." A powerful passage in *Summer* mentions a poem carved into a tombstone: "The tree in me shall never die. Be I ashes be I dust. That is the tree that joins the sky. To earth and us" (2021, 63-64). This last quote is significantly a good summary of several aspects treated in this paper as it addresses both immortality and the tree as a link whether it is between generations or different literary works. This is not the only focal point in the *Quartet*, though. Daniel Gluck, who is metamorphosed into a tree in *Autumn*, is present in the four novels and connected to the most important characters and that is why, arguably, he could be understood as an embodiment of Smith's Internal Tree as he appears in relation to nearly all the topics that have been discussed.

3. Conclusion

This paper began with a desire to challenge the bad reviews received by *Autumn* and to prove that it is composed of various intertwined layers. Our object of study, arboreal symbolism, has shown the multiple connections that exist inside this narrative, the *Seasonal Quartet* and with other literary works. As she said in one of her interviews "even things which seem separate and finished are infinitely connected and will infinitely connect" (Cohen). With this purpose in mind, I have constantly referred to her own dendrochronology, the rings of her Internal Tree, understood as the external influences that Smith received during the conception of *Autumn* and her other works. That is, she made use of arboreal symbols inherited from previous authors, including allusions to current and past historical events as well as rewriting topics treated by well-known writers through intertextuality.

The role of novels throughout history has not only been to resume and adapt their influences to their times. They perform a cyclical role as sources of inspiration for our present generation and can help to raise awareness about important issues. Her Internal Tree – and its embodiment in the character of Daniel Gluck – appears as a portrayal of her authorial intent that grows from the conditioning traits imposed both by her roots and life experiences and attempts to give a voice to those individuals who, like her, do not conform to sociocultural stereotypes. As she claims in *Girl Meets Boy*: "Nobody grows up mythless... It's what we do with the myths we grow up with that matters" (2007, 98).

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