

LEAVES OF AUTUMN: SHERWOOD ANDERSON
AND THE SEASON OF EPIPHANY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the importance of the autumnal season as a motif in the works of Sherwood Anderson. Although the whole corpus of Anderson's work has been examined, the major focus of the thesis will be on the fiction. The little poetry that Anderson wrote does give hints of the autumnal motif, but they are not well defined and are excluded because of the insignificance of the poetry itself. On the other hand, the autobiographical and journalistic writings are included because they contain many invaluable clues to the meaning of the motif.

The arrangement of the thesis defies chronology in order to make the meaning of the motif as clear as possible before discussing it in terms of the fiction. The first chapter is designed to give an overview of the thesis while attempting to define the character of the autumnal motif. The second chapter discusses the influence of the season on Anderson's own life which was already in its autumn by the time the author began writing seriously. Although the newspaper articles were written after most of the fiction, the chapter dealing with journalistic references precedes the fiction with a view to Anderson's direct, non-fiction comments which are considered essential

to a clear understanding of the motif as it appears in the fiction. Chapter four then discusses the fictional handling of the season with Anderson's own comments in mind. Chapter five attempts to capsule the thematic implications of the motif in its dominant metaphor.

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The autumnal season is an important motif in the writings of Sherwood Anderson. Although Anderson is attentive to all the yearly seasons, his writings demonstrate a marked preference for autumn. This is the one season which appears most often in his work, especially at times of epiphany.

Anderson's feeling for the fall season is established through an examination of his autobiographical works where the season takes a prominent position at critical points in the author's own life. The handling of the season in these autobiographical works is particularly revealing when checked against biographical fact to show that Anderson is manipulating the season as a motif in his own life story.

The character of the autumnal motif is best defined in Anderson's own words as he treats its many faceted personality in his journalistic writings for The Smyth County News and The Marion Democrat. In these non-fiction accounts he deals directly with the season, noting his own partiality to that time of the year which can be both glorious and sad.

The most significant use of the motif is, of course, in the fiction where the autumnal season appears both as background setting and as antagonist. A significant number of Anderson characters reach epiphany in the fall, and many of these are actually moved to their recognition by the forces of the season. Although these forces are varied, the season is characterized by a restlessness which reflects and agitates a similar restlessness within the human character.

There are, in fact, numerous metaphorical references in which the human character is likened to an autumn leaf. The autumn leaf is either a dry, rustling leaf or a wet, clinging leaf, and the difference separates the Anderson hero, who adapts himself to the uncertain winds of life, from the Anderson grotesque, who clings to his truth while life passes him by. Thus, the autumnal motif takes on thematic significance as the metaphor of man's precarious position on the tree of life.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

To scatter into nothing on a gust
Of wind which brought the twilight to the trees.
The drifted leaves, the white October dust . . .

V. L. Edminson, "Temper in October"

The seasonal motif is, by no means, new to literature. Whether it be in the literature of the Bible, Shakespeare, or a notable modern, the season of the year is often a dominant feature of the storyteller's tale. The tales of Sherwood Anderson are no exception, but are almost constantly colored by nature's seasonal dress. Not infrequently does Anderson note the season in the opening words of a tale, and rarely is an Anderson character required to act out his drama against a sterile backdrop.

Traditionally, the motif of season is employed as a mirror which reflects the moods and actions dramatized in the characters. Anderson proves himself adept at staging love against a clear summer sky and clouding the lonelier episodes with the colors of fall and winter. But this is oversimplifying Anderson. Anderson has never been known as a man of convention, and his handling of the seasons is no exception. Although he proves himself skilled within the tradition, he also moves beyond it. As if he has painted the backdrop too vividly, the season will oftentimes step out of its frame to take an active role in the dramatization

of a tale. At such times, the season becomes an active force, not a mere reflector, but an antagonist which stimulates mood and action in the human characters.

Like his human characters, Anderson's seasons demonstrate a variety of personalities, and it is the autumnal season which proves itself the most notable. Glorified in the rich and brilliant dress of its dying leaves, tarnished by a dark and heavy rain, or tinged with moonlight, Anderson's fall is an entity of many facets. In the traditional sense, it may represent either the prime of life or the time of old age which precedes the winter of death. For the younger Anderson character, autumn marks the beginning of mature life with all its myriad possibilities. For the aging character, it serves as a mirror of regret for what might have been. Anderson's fall is a season of insight for both the young and old. It is the season most often reserved for the Anderson epiphany.

As the season of epiphany, autumn often comes to life as the very force which leads the character to insight. Whether it be through the whispering of dry leaves, the banter of raindrops, or the illusions of a harvest moon, the autumnal season, as created by Anderson, is invested with the power to call a character out of himself toward a new perception. The rustling leaves frequently reflect an agitation within the human character, but they may also

serve to make him aware of his restlessness. Likewise, the patter of the fall raindrops may stimulate a restlessness within the character, or the moonlight play tricks upon an already aroused fancy. The character may simply be stirred to a weighty recognition, or he may be driven to some impulsive action. It is often on an autumn day when the most uncommunicative of Anderson's characters feel driven to tell their stories. Others feel compelled to escape physically, fleeing their familiar locale. Even the most hardened of Anderson's characters come to life in the fall, stirred by restlessness and given over to a spontaneity of action.

A combined autobiographical and biographical search shows just how important this season was to Anderson. Autumn appears in a prominent position, as being the season associated with the major epiphanies of the writer's private life. That the association is, in one instance, only fanciful, tends to demonstrate the power that the season must have held over Anderson's imagination. His mother's death, which actually occurred in the spring, is recorded in two of three autobiographies, Tar: A Midwest Childhood and A Story Teller's Story, as taking place on a rainy evening in the fall. Although Anderson warns that these are not particularly factual autobiographies, it is significant that his fancy would twice transport such a major event from spring to autumn. What Anderson describes as the low

stage of all his childhood memories is recounted in Tar. This is the fall of Tar's serious and lengthy illness, agitated by severe poverty and the father's heavy drinking. Even if Anderson is again altering the truth, autumn is now an integral part of the story. The season is described in detail, and the falling leaves are linked closely to Tar's agitation and hallucinations.

Probably the most notorious of Anderson's personal experiences is his escape from the business world on November 28, 1912. Just what part the season actually played in his impulsive flight can only be speculated because Anderson's accounts of the incident give no mention of the actual season. The event, as romanticized in Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs, takes place on a clear summer day; but A Story Teller's Story¹ and Anderson's biographers² suggest that this account is an oversimplification. Does Anderson use the clear summer day in a traditional sense to imply that he made a clear-cut decision, forgetting his amnesia

¹ Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story (1924; rpt. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), pp. 225-26.

² David D. Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), p. 4; Irving Howe, Sherwood Anderson, The American Men of Letters Series (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1951), p. 49; and James Scheville, Sherwood Anderson: His Life and Work (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1951), p. 55.

and his need for hospitalization? Could this be an evasion of unpleasant detail which Anderson seems never to have been able to explain satisfactorily even to himself? Perhaps the season of agitation is repressed along with the disturbing details. As difficult as it is to separate fact from fancy when dealing with Anderson, it still remains that the fall of 1912 was a most turbulent time for the author. This particular fall marks the beginning of Anderson's career as a writer in the autumn of his life.

This career was to include a short sojourn in the field of journalism, beginning with Anderson's purchase of the two Marion, Virginia, newspapers in the fall of 1927. In his journalistic writing for The Smyth County News and The Marion Democrat, Anderson speaks frequently of fall, and many of his articles deal directly with the season as a newsworthy resident of the county. In such articles as "Fall," "Late September Days," "Autumn," "Virginia Falls," and "It Rains," Anderson describes the autumnal season and its effects upon himself and his fellow townspeople--effects which are often as varied as the temperaments of the season. In response to the brighter fall days, when the autumnal colors are most resplendent, Anderson is moved to name this season as his favorite. At such times, his tone is exuberant and his pen resembles the artist's paint brush, glorifying the Virginia hills. The same pen may, at another

time, paint the same season with a tint of sadness. This sadness may be merely a hint of nostalgia for the dying year, or perhaps a twinge of apprehension in the face of a coming winter. In one of the more literary pieces written for the papers, "A Mountain Dance," Anderson features the moonlight and the whispering wind as the instigators of an impetuous gathering--a kind of pagan fertility dance, marking the passage of fall to winter. In "It Rains" he blames the lingering fall rains for the restlessness and depression evident on the streets of Marion, alluding also to the dark evil deeds and foolish acts which may be prompted by such restlessness. Through his journalistic writings, it becomes obvious that Anderson is very much aware of the autumnal season and deems it an influential force in the affairs of men.

With this view of the season in mind, it is easy to see its influence on the fictional characters who are particularly susceptible to the autumnal forces. The season seems to be an especially dangerous one for marriages, when numerous Anderson characters finally recognize a stagnant relationship and find the courage to abandon it. Reminiscent of the author's escape from the business world, husbands and wives simply get up and walk out. The entire story of Many Marriages, the flight of Webster from factory and wife, takes place in the fall. Bruce Dudley, in Dark

Laughter, leaves his wife "on a certain fall evening," and it is just such another fall evening when Fred Grey returns home to find his wife leaving with Bruce. Likewise, on a night in September, Sam McPhearson throws a window open to the whisper of coming frost and chooses career over wife. In the short story, "The Door of the Trap," Hugh Walker, on an autumn afternoon, experiences a strong desire to escape the prison of his marriage, but gets no further than an unusual temper tantrum. Whether the autumnal season is an actual antagonist in the disillusionment or simply a significant backdrop, it proves to be an ever present factor in the broken marriages of Anderson's fiction.

It is also in the fall that one walks through the orchards of Winesburg, Ohio to find the twisted apples, a symbol for Anderson's grotesques. The grotesques, because of their inability to communicate, exist within a private prison, and Winesburg is the story of their desperate but futile attempts to escape. With many of these unfortunates, autumn plays out its greatest role as antagonist. Where all else has failed, this season is often able to stir the seed within which calls out for life and understanding. In "Adventure" Alice Hindman waits eleven long years for the return of her fiance, her existence becoming more and more isolated until one evening in early fall. On this particular night she is driven by the beating raindrops to run

naked into the street, demanding an answer from life. Although the answer is heartbreaking, she finds her epiphany that autumn night. On a similar October night George Willard is privileged to hear the sad story of Enoch Robinson's room. The usually silent grotesque wanders out into the rain and is compelled to seek understanding in the young reporter. With something of the same desperation, Elmer Cowley calls George to the railroad station on a raw November night, attempting to show someone that he is not queer.

Several of the more fortunate citizens of Winesburg are affected by the gentler tempers of the season. In "The Untold Lie" Ray Pearson, saddened by the beauty of the red and yellow hills, looks back to his youth and runs through the fields to shout a protest against the life he feels he has been forced to live. Young David Hardy is suddenly prompted to run away from home one cloudy fall evening and is finally launched into manhood on a similar day later that same autumn. Even Winesburg's hero, George Willard, finds epiphany amid the dry rustling leaves of an autumn evening. In a state of agitated sadness, old memories and new impulses are aroused, and George perceives something of the sophistication of maturity. This epiphany belongs not only to George, but to all of Winesburg as the

epiphany of the book.

Then there is the epiphany of the adventurer. This category includes Kit Brandon, Sam McPherson and Hugh McVey, the more daring Anderson characters who launch into whirlwind careers which bring them wealth and fame. These are the bold ones, for the most part insensitive to seasonal change. They do not, however, escape the autumn of epiphany. Kit Brandon, notorious bootlegger, is a hard woman, little given to sentiment--except in the fall. It is at this time of the year that Kit becomes more human and eventually realizes the futility of her wild abandonment. Likewise, Sam McPherson, admittedly a man of the industrial city and unaffected by nature, not only leaves his wife in the fall but also returns to her in the same season. As with Kit, the eventual settling down suggests the beginning of a more meaningful life for Sam. Due to a vision seen in the clouds of an autumn sky, Hugh McVey begins his career as a famous inventor, only to reject it years later in an autumn moonlight as he stands with his pregnant wife. Unlike the prisoners of marriage, the adventurers seek life's meaning within the family structure, autumn marking the end of their adventures.

Also a significant motif in many short stories, the autumnal season accompanies a variety of singular epiphanies. In "A Chicago Hamlet" the fall moon induces a

spiritual cleansing, and a spiritual death is revealed in "Brother Death." For "The Ohio Pagan" and "The Man Who Becomes a Woman," the season plays a direct role in the awakening of sexual awareness--a part usually reserved for spring and summer. Although the use of autumn in many of the short stories does not follow a distinct pattern, the repeated appearance of the season at a crucial point in the action further demonstrates Anderson's preoccupation with the season.

In many instances, the season takes on thematic proportions in the metaphor of the leaf. The concept of the uncertainty of life underlies all of the author's work and is most clearly defined in the recurrent autumnal metaphor--man, as a leaf, tossed by the wind. George Willard's sophistication is directly linked with this metaphor and his recognition of life's incertitude. An interesting variation of the metaphor in "Brothers" speaks of the dying leaves that should be carried away by the wind, but are, instead, brutally beaten by the rain. In these and other instances, the metaphor is also implicit in the action of the story as the character is moved to restlessness in the season of dry leaves. It is often the season itself which agitates the character, as if he too were a leaf. The core of the Anderson epiphany is the leaf's recognition of his precarious position. As the

natural metaphor for the concept of life's uncertainty,
autumn dominates these scenes of recognition.

CHAPTER II. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Oh, it's a long, long while
From May to December,
But the days grow short
When you reach September,
When the autumn weather
Turns the leaves to flame,
One hasn't got time
For the waiting game.

Maxwell Anderson, "September Song"

Tracing the influence of the autumnal season in Anderson's private life is a more difficult task than might at first be expected. Surrounding the author, who left three autobiographical works, there is more confusion than if he had simply left the story of his life to the biographers. His own accounts are frequently dominated by a lively imagination and laced with seeming contradictions. Anderson, even in the telling of his own life, was more concerned with the impression created than with the facts which might originally have given rise to that impression. His first autobiographical work, Tar: A Midwest Childhood, begins with the confession, "I am a story teller starting to tell a story and cannot be expected to tell the truth. Truth is impossible to me. It is like goodness, something aimed at but never hit."¹ In A Story Teller's Story the

¹ Sherwood Anderson, Tar: A Midwest Childhood (1926; rpt. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 5.

warning is repeated and the author's purpose clarified:

"But these notes make no pretense of being a record of fact. That isn't their object. They are merely notes of impressions, a record of vagrant thoughts, hopes, ideas that have floated through the mind of one present-day American. It is likely that I have not, and will not, put into them one truth, measuring by the ordinary standards of truth. It is my aim to be true to the essence of things. That's what I'm after."² For Anderson, the essence clearly belonged to the impression or feeling of a given experience as it might be colored by the imagination. In the preface to his Memoirs he explains his use of the imagination in terms of feeling and tone: "I believe in the imagination, its importance. To me there is a certain music to all good prose writing. There is tone and color in words as in notes in music. Persons also have a certain tone, a certain color. What care I for the person's age, the color of his hair, the length of his legs? When writing of another being I have always found it best to do so in accordance with my feeling. Besides, men do not exist in facts. They exist in dreams."³ Anderson is speaking here of those

²Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story (1924; rpt. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), p. 76.

³Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 9.

persons he has met in his lifetime and again warning the reader not to look for facts. From this it might be assumed that what Anderson records of his own life is truer to the tone and feeling of certain experiences than it is to the facts of those experiences.

When such fanciful renderings are checked against the biographical facts, the comparative dimension gives an inside view of impressions and influences. Although the source of an influence may be questionable, the final impact is made the more obvious. In the case of seasonal influence this is particularly relevant where Anderson frequently transposes major events from one season to another. While his original acquaintance and association with each particular season must be either guessed or attributed to the Jungian archetype, his use of certain seasons can be seen as a deliberate manipulation of tone and atmosphere. In much the same way that he might set the background for the experiences of his fictional characters, Anderson fits the setting of his own experiences to the appropriate mood.

Whether in blatant disregard of the actual seasons or in accord with biographical dates, the author's accounts of his own life reveal a pattern of associations which echoes his fictional handling of the seasonal motif. In

the case of autumn this constitutes a recurring appearance of the season as a setting for major epiphanies in the author's life. The season intrudes upon the imagination of the writer and colors his own life as it does the lives of his fictional characters.

Anderson's early associations with the autumnal season were mixed with awe and fear. Evidently the Andersons' financial situation was not always a stable one, and young Sherwood's childhood was clouded by fear of hunger and poverty—a fear which seemed to intensify with each approaching winter. Exactly how close the family ever came to actual poverty is not clear, but Anderson's later memories draw the line closer than do his biographers.⁴ What he describes in Tar as ". . . the low stage in all the memories Tar afterward kept of his childhood,"⁵ was an autumn of both poverty and illness. The exact significance of this particular fall is difficult to determine because of Tar's fragmented hallucinations, but it definitely left a strong impression which lasted until he was an old man. Tar's hallucinations are a mixture of falling leaves, floating

⁴Irving Howe, Sherwood Anderson, The American Men of Letters Series (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1951), p. 13.

⁵Anderson, Tar, p. 70. All subsequent references to this work will be cited in the text.

trees, and dancing faces.

Tar spent most of that fall sitting on the front porch:

The Mooreheads lived in a mean little house and all through the fall Tar had been ill. As the fall advanced there was a time of bitter cold days and then there came a period of soft warm days.

Tar sat on the porch wrapped in a blanket. Now the corn in distant fields was in shocks and the other crops had been hauled away. In a small field near at hand where the corn crop had not been good a farmer had gone into the field to pick the corn and then had turned cows into the field to nibble at the stalks. In the woods the red and yellow leaves were falling fast. With every gust of wind they flew like brightly colored birds across the field of Tar's vision. In the corn field the cows making their way among the dry standing corn stalks made a low crashing sound. (p. 65)

The quickly moving leaves are not mentioned again in the chapter, but their fleeting movement is echoed again and again in Tar's hallucinations.

While the leaves themselves are not a part of the hallucinations, the image of trees is a dominant feature of Tar's most terrifying vision. In his fear of death, Tar somehow attaches his own existence to the trees which continually threaten to float out of existence:

Tar knew nothing of death but was afraid. Things that should be small became large, things that should remain large became small. Often Tar's own hands, white and small, seemed to leave his arms and float away. They floated away over the tops of the trees seen through the window, almost disappeared into the sky.

Not to have everything disappear was Tar's problem. It was a problem he could not explain to anyone, and absorbed him completely. Often the tree that had come out of the ground and had floated

away became merely a black dot in the sky but it was his problem not to lose sight of it. If it happened that you lost sight of the tree you lost sight of everything. Tar did not know why that was true but it was. Grimly he held on. If he held on the tree would come back, everything would come back. Someday he would get all adjusted again. (pp. 72-73)

Here Tar's hands float away from the limbs of his body as he had earlier seen the leaves separated and carried away from the limbs of the trees. Tar is himself a tree, struggling to hold on to life. Even in childhood, the portent of death exists in the metaphor of autumn, the season of old age and death.

Tar's hallucinations which continue throughout that fall take on mystical proportions with the appearance of the dancing faces. In a manner reminiscent of the fleeting leaves, the faces dance across the boy's field of vision:

The faces in the street before the houses in which the Mooreheads had lived had sometimes floated across the fancy of the sick boy as now in the kitchen of the Moorehead house the faces were floating on the wall back of the stove.

Tar's father kept calling new names and new faces kept coming. Tar had grown very white.

The faces on the wall appeared and disappeared faster than ever. Tar's white small hands gripped the edges of his chair.

Had it become a test for him to follow with his fancy all of the faces, must he keep track of them as he did of the trees when they seemed to float into the sky? (p. 73)

Was this some mystical vision of Anderson's life-long struggle to hold in words the faces of his imagination?

Whatever the actual meaning of all Tar's swirling visions during that fall, the remaining impression was a significant one and is recorded again in Memoirs.⁶

As there is no mention of a childhood illness of this nature in the biographies of Sherwood Anderson, the reality of this experience cannot be confirmed. It cannot be denied, however, that the seasonal setting is vital to the essence of the experience as recorded. The inconsistency of the days, cold and then warm, the fleeting leaves, and the threat of winter hardships lend a meaning to the boy's visions that would be lost in any other season.

Another very important experience of the writer's early life was the time of his mother's death. According to Anderson's biographers, Emma Anderson actually died in May of 1895.⁷ Yet, both in Tar and A Story Teller's Story Anderson describes the time of his mother's death as a rainy evening in the fall. In Tar he records that "Mary Moorehead died during a night in the fall. Tar was then selling papers and John had gone to the factory. Tar got home in the early evening that day, his mother was not at the table and Margaret said she was not feeling well. It was raining outside. The children ate in silence, the

⁶Anderson, Memoirs, pp. 55-56.

⁷Howe, Anderson, p. 26.

depression that always came with one of the mother's bad times hanging over the house. Depression is something on which the imagination feeds. When the meal was over Tar helped Margaret wash the dishes" (pp. 206-7). The season sets the tone in the beginning, and the children's depression is reflected in the rain. The season is emphasized even more in the account from A Story Teller's Story:

Mother had died swiftly, mysteriously, without warning. It was as though she had got out of bed on a fall morning and had taken a long look at her sons. "It's about the time when they will have to push out into the world. Any influence I may have on their lives has already been exerted. There is no time to think of any other purpose in life for myself and anyway I am too tired. Having lived out my life now I shall die."

It was as though she had said something of the sort to herself and had then laid down her life as one might lay down a finished book. On a rainy dismal day in the fall there she was, coming in at the kitchen door from hanging a wash out on the line, temporarily strung up in our woodshed, smiling quietly, making one of her quick soft ironic observations, sweetening always the air of the room into which she came with her presence.

On such a rainy morning in the fall she was like that, as she will live always in the memory of her sons, and then, on another equally wet dismal fall day, two or three weeks later, she was dead.⁸

Here Anderson is careful to point out the season four times in the space of half a page, again echoing the sorrow in the wet dismal weather. The fact that he is recording an event which actually occurred in the spring only emphasizes his attention to the autumnal season as the appropriate

⁸Anderson, A Story Teller's Story, p. 63.

time of passing.

More than just a time of sorrow, the death of Anderson's mother marked an important change in the boy's life. The family unit began to disintegrate, and at the age of nineteen, Sherwood began to think of the city and of manhood. Although the date is uncertain, James Scherville records in his biography of Anderson that Sherwood left his childhood town of Clyde for Chicago in the fall of 1896.⁹ Anderson does not record his actual departure from Clyde, nor does he dwell on his life as a factory hand, a soldier in the Cuban uprising, or his years as a businessman. Although these years are mentioned in A Story Teller's Story and Memoirs, they seem to be of minor importance.

Nevertheless, the autumnal season evidently did figure into Anderson's business career as a time for twice changing jobs and his eventual break with the business world. In Irving Howe's biography of Anderson, the young man made an important business move in the fall of 1906 and again in the fall of 1907.¹⁰ The latter move marked the beginning of his major business enterprises, his own very successful paint factory. His somewhat notorious break with

⁹James Scherville, Sherwood Anderson: His Life and Work (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1951), p. 19.

¹⁰Howe, Anderson, pp. 39-40.

this particular business endeavor five years later also occurred in the fall.

The event which Anderson seemed to see as the major epiphany of his career marked his formal rejection of the businessman's life and the beginning of his full-time devotion to writing. In Anderson's utilization of the event in his writing the experience assumes mythic proportions as a conscious moral flight. In Memoirs he tells of the incident as if it were a planned escape:

The thought occurred to me that if men thought me a little insane they would forgive me if I lit out, left the business in which they had invested their money on their hands. I did it one day--walked into my office and called the stenographer--It was a bright warm day in summer. I closed the door in my office and spoke to her. A startled look came into her eyes. "My feet are cold and wet," I said. "I have been walking too long on the bed of a river." Saying these words I walked out of the door leaving her staring after me with frightened eyes. I walked eastward along a railroad track, toward the city of Cleveland. There were five or six dollars in my pocket.¹¹

The bright summer setting is in keeping with the tone of a clear and calculated action. The version from A Story Teller's Story is less secure in tone and makes no mention of the season:

The woman was looking into my eyes the while I looked into hers. Perhaps I had grown a little pale, and now she grew pale. "You're sick," she said, and her words gave me an idea. There was wanted a

¹¹Anderson, Memoirs, p. 194.

justification of myself, not to myself but to others. A crafty thought came. Was the thought crafty or was I, at the moment, a little insane, a "nut," as every American who loves to say of every man who does something a little out of the groove.

* * * * *
 Whether at the moment I merely became shrewd and crafty or whether I really became temporarily insane I shall never quite know. What I did was to step very close to the woman and, looking directly into her eyes, I laughed gayly. Others besides herself would, I knew, hear the words I was now speaking. I looked at my feet. "I have been wading in a long river, and my feet are wet," I said.¹²

Here Anderson is obviously less sure of his decision, although still romanticizing the incident to some extent.

His biographers give a much different account of Anderson's action, repeatedly referring to the incident as his breakdown. They record that he walked out of his factory on November 27, 1912, and wandered aimlessly for four days. When he was discovered and taken to the hospital by a Cleveland pharmacist, he did not even know his name. His case was diagnosed as a nervous breakdown from overwork.¹³

Although it is impossible to say what part the autumnal season may have played in the breakdown, it is important to note that the season of agitation, depression, and escape

¹²Anderson, A Story Teller's Story, pp. 225-26.

¹³Howe, Anderson, p. 49. For similar accounts see also Scheville, Anderson, pp. 35-38, and David D. Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), pp. 14-17.

was the appropriate atmosphere for Anderson's flight. That Anderson himself ignores and alters the actual season is merely in keeping with the other details which are ignored and denied. Anderson consistently glosses the unpleasant details and attempts to romanticize the incident as due to a conscious moral decision. His placing of that decision on a summer day is more consistent with the tone of the impression he wishes to convey than any autumn day could ever be.

Anderson did not want the world to see him as a confused and broken man, and thus, he painted the legend consistent with the desires of his imagination. The discrepancy between fact and fantasy is outlined by Irving Howe:

The truth, as Karl Anderson has written, is that there "was nothing deliberate" in Sherwood's breakdown. It was quickened by business worries, immediately provoked by an inability to choose a consistent course of life, and based on a fundamental psychic maladjustment in his private life. The legend, on the other hand, was a dramatization of a later decision to devote himself to art--and it is not difficult to understand why Anderson should have preferred the world to believe that at the age of 36 he made a bold change in his style of life, similar to Gauguin's a quarter of a century before him.¹⁴

Such a legend required the clarity of a summer day just as the actual breakdown may have required the agitation

¹⁴ Howe, Anderson, p. 49.

of a fall day.

Whatever the real truth about his initial decision, Anderson's career did, at this time, turn from business to writing. Although the road was not an easy one, involving a constant struggle for money and three divorces, Anderson remained true to his decision until the end. The divorces cannot be tied closely to any season, for Anderson does not write of his own marriages and his biographers tend to respect this privacy. Each divorce seems to have been only the anticlimax to an already dead relationship.

The autumnal season does, however, seem to hold an important position in regard to his writing. Of his rather turbulent writing career, both the critics and the writer himself view his book Winesburg, Ohio as the crowning achievement. The birth of this work Anderson recalls in Memoirs as the writer's moment:

And so it must be that I am writing here for other writers, recalling to them a certain moment in their own lives. It may be that many writers do not get to the moment. . . .

I had got into bed in that rooming house. I was very tired. It was a late fall night and raining and I had not bothered to put on my pajamas.

I was there naked in the bed and I sprang up. I went to my typewriter and began to write. It was there under those circumstances, myself sitting near an open window, the rain occasionally blowing in and wetting my bare back, that I did my first writing.

I wrote the first of the stories, afterwards to be known as the Winesburg stories. I wrote it, as I wrote them all, complete in the one sitting.

I do not think I afterwards changed a word of it. I wrote it off so, sitting at my desk, in that room, the rain blowing in on me and wetting my back and when I had written it I got up from my desk.¹⁵

Accordingly, the fall rain is an integral part of a spontaneous and impulsive realization. Here, at least as concerns the season, both Anderson and the biographers concur.¹⁶

Other references to the fall as a productive writing period are scattered throughout Anderson's letters. Although his letters indicate that he wrote in all seasons, he speaks often of getting down to serious work in the fall. The need for money, the necessity of providing for another year seems to call for a more serious effort in the fall. A majority of his books were published in the fall, and most of his lecture tours were scheduled for this season. While the summers seem to be a restful time for the writer, the fall is always a busy time. On one day in the autumn of 1917, he writes:

There are certain days when one seems to have the strength of some gigantic and prehistoric monster. It has been so with me today. I worked for hours and then went to walk in the smoky street. A storm swept over the city. Against a black sky the hard snow, half hail, was driven furiously. The people hurried shivering along. I wanted to embrace them all, men and women. It seemed to me that within my old shell was room for them all, that there a

¹⁵Anderson, Memoirs, p. 287.

¹⁶Scheville, Anderson, p. 97.

fire burned at which they could all warm themselves.

All day my mind has reached out and out. I have thought of everyone and everything. Minute little happenings in the lives of many people have been revealed to me. Today, had I a dozen hands, I could write a dozen tales, strange, wonderful tales, all at one time.

One wears himself away at such times. I did not try to work, but walked and walked. A storm swept in from the lake, and the rolling, tumbling waters answered something in me and quieted me. Such times cannot last, but they are glorious. They are the reward of holding firm against the daily, dreary commonplaceness of everyday life. When they come, it is revealed again how truly and really life is worth while.¹⁷

Such days as this seem to have come for Anderson more frequently in the autumn.

It was, in fact, the autumn of life for Anderson when he turned to serious writing at the age of thirty-six. Always conscious of his late beginning and the possibility that he might never be able to develop into the writer he wanted to be, Anderson expresses his fear of unrealized life in a passage from A Story Teller's Story:

I was walking in the streets of the city, that evening in November. There was snow on the roofs of buildings, but it had all been scraped off the roadways. There is a thing happens to American men. It is pitiful. One walks along, going slowly along in the streets, and when one looks sharply at one's fellows something dreadful comes into the mind. There is a thing happens to the backs of the necks of American men. There is this sense

¹⁷Letters of Sherwood Anderson, ed. Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), pp. 19-20.

of something drying, getting old without having ripened. The skin does something. One becomes conscious of the back of one's own neck and is worried. "Might not all our lives ripen like fruit-- drop at the end, full-skinned and rich with color, from the tree of life, eh?" When one is in the country one looks at a tree. "Can a tree be a dead dried-up thing while it is still young? Can a tree be a neurotic?" one asks.¹⁸

In terms of the autumn harvest, the richest of possibilities is there, but also is its antithesis. Life may be full and meaningful, or it may become a dry dead thing. The duality of the autumnal season lends itself to either alternative. The fall may be depicted as the season of abundance when the earth gives forth its fruits, or it may be shown as the prelude to death when the trees are stripped and prepared for the sleep of winter. Anderson realizes that, like his imagined characters, he too is subject to life's uncertainty, and he writes in a letter of 1933:

It is likely that I shall plunge on to the very end, plans made, the end of a life like the beginning filled with trial and error. Of course I know that it doesn't matter. There is nothing I can do or will do--put down, say or sing--that will not be forgotten, a little sound floating down the wind. However, Burt, it stays in my mind that we also are a part of something, of some incomprehensible thing. If we could understand, we would be gods. We aren't.¹⁹

Anderson here echoes the image of the autumn leaf tossed by the winds, and, seeing the futility of his own life, plods on.

¹⁸ A Story Teller's Story, p. 321.

¹⁹ Letters, p. 28.

CHAPTER III. JOURNALISTIC REFERENCES

When Autumn Leaves
Drift by my window
The Autumn Leaves,
Of red and gold. . .

Jacques Prevert and Johnny Mercer,
"Autumn Leaves"

Anderson's journalistic writings for the country weeklies, The Smyth County News and The Marion Democrat, offer a wealth of material for the study of the author's attitudes and reactions to everyday life. For two years Anderson made the small Virginia town of Marion his home and lived the life of a newspaper man. He bought the two area papers in 1927, and himself filled the role of publisher, editor, and reporter, writing most of what appeared in both papers. His articles are, however, journalistic only because of the medium in which they appear. In the outset, he warns his subscribers that they should look elsewhere for straight news: "The aim of this paper is to give expression to the joys and sorrows, the political fights, all of the everyday life of a very typical American community."¹ Consequently, the papers hold many sensitive

¹ Sherwood Anderson, Return to Winesburg: Selections from Four Years of Writing for a Country Newspaper, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 14. Because copies of the actual newspapers were not available for research, all articles cited here are from either Return to Winesburg or Hello Towns, two collections of selected writings from the newspapers.

and intimate reports of the town's life as observed and interpreted by Anderson.

The editor-reporter is particularly observant of the passing seasons and their effects upon himself and the townspeople. Such articles as "Late September Days," "Winter Day in the Country," "Summer," and "Late March Days" feature the annual seasons as influential forces in the community. These particular seasonal portraits describe cold September nights which induce heavy sleep, colors of a winter sky which inspire a lucky observer, summer odors which delight the nose, and spring winds which set the moods of the fishes. Similar descriptions appear frequently throughout the papers, in other feature stories, and as significant details in many of the news stories. Such widespread coverage of the seasons tends to indicate that they were important influences upon the Marion community.

Anderson's own personal attachment to the seasons is described in the article "Autumn": "I would not live always where there was only one season, no matter how lovely that climate might be. It is the change of time and season that fascinates me, that seems to bring me nearer to nature and its Great Architect."² This

²Return, p. 32.

fascination with the seasons is more than a passing fancy and is expressed over and over in accounts of long walks into the country. Perhaps one of the main forces which held the already famous author to the life of the small town, the presence of the changing seasons is twice given as a justification for continuing the life of a country journalist. To accusations of the dullness of such a position, Anderson answers, "I do, however, see the changing color in our hills. I see the bare lines of the hills in winter, the subtle, changing winter colors, the spring colors, the fall colors. There is a lot of sky down where I am. I see the changing seasons, horses pulling plows across fields, the fields being painted with rather delicate changing colors thus."³ Similar references to the seasonal varieties also accompany his reasons for not selling the papers.⁴ Is it surprising then that the seasons should be among the most newsworthy items in the papers?

Of all the avatars of the year's cycle, Anderson seems to have been closest to fall. It is the season most often featured in such articles as "Autumn," "Virginia Falls,"

³"An Answer," Return, p. 181.

⁴Sherwood Anderson, "Will You Sell Your Papers?" Hello Towne (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), p. 337.

"Late September Days," "O! Marion," "Fall," "It Rains," and "Sorghum, Corn, and Apples." In the article "Autumn" Anderson defends the season against the label of melancholy and names it his favorite:

I do not agree with the poet who termed this season the "melancholy days" and the "saddest of the year."

To me there is no more lovely season, no time when my own thoughts seem more in tune with nature. The frost on the pumpkin; the corn in the shock; the looking forward to happy, lazy hours before the roaring fire, while the wind whistles through the naked trees; the vivid colors of the leaves; and Thanksgiving, and Christmas; and turkey, mince pie, cider and nuts.

And the rosey-cheeked children trooping home from school; football; Halloween, with its witches and goblins; roast apples; and Santa Claus coming.

Old Mother Goose will soon be picking the fluffy down from the geese, to fall in flakes of snow of purest white. Is there anything purer, more lovely, than virgin snow? Who does not love to watch it fall, slowly, silently, until it blankets the dead earth with a mantle of velvety softness?

And the sliding--boys belly-busting; sweethearts holding tightly; the merry screams; the upset in the snow. And the skating on the pond, with the blazing fire to warm by; and then the trudging home in the fading sky.

Nature is taking its rest so that next year it can blossom forth in green glory. The trees and grass and shrubs are asleep--conserving life to emerge again in masses of color.

And the anticipation of spring with its robins and kites and marbles.

No, autumn is not melancholy. The lovely Indian Summer is to me the most charming season of all the year.⁵

Even apart from the traditional festivities of the season,

⁵Return, pp. 31-32.

Anderson demonstrates a love for the very colors and sounds of the Indian Summer. In "Virginia Falls" he speaks of one such autumn day with something of religious fervor:

Saturday, the 20th--a peculiarly exciting day. It was a painter's day. The light had a peculiar quality. Colors stood out with amazing vividness.

* * * * * Individual trees stood forth. A young maple, far up the side of the hill, was touched by a stray wind. It seemed to dance. It was like a young girl running down the hill.

* * * * * Some of the pagan people see God in trees, cattle, weeds, fields of grain. I am more than a little pagan myself.

In the evening the moon shining. There was a winding road with the river below it. How silent the woods. Day had passed imperceptibly into night. The moonlight had much of the quality of the day just passed.

The noises in the woods. Little things running on dry leaves. The water in the river made many noises. I stood a long time listening. How many tones could I catch? Oh, that I had an ear.

There was something special and sacred about the day and the night. I could not sleep afterwards but then I did not want to sleep so it was all right.⁶

Had Anderson been a painter, the day could not have been painted more brilliantly.

Evident in both these articles is the vitalizing force of the season, making itself known through the whistling of the wind, the color and rustle of the dry leaves, and the poignant silence of the moonlight. The peculiarly exciting day which robs Anderson of his sleep is immediately

⁶Towns, pp. 331-32.

recognizable as the same antagonist which was to bring a similar restlessness to many of the characters of his imagination.

Also recognizable in these portraits of the autumnal season are various pagan associations. For the season of the harvest, the season of abundance, Anderson's allusions to pagan worship are particularly appropriate. In the pagan sense, the vitalizing force of the season becomes tangible in the life-sustaining vegetation yielded to the harvesters. Evidently, the Virginia falls were particularly generous in this respect. The article "Sorghum, Corn, and Apples" is one of several articles which records the abundance of the season:

This is a rare time of the year to live in Marion and Smyth County. It is the time of apple-picking, the time of corn-cutting, of sorghum-making. There has been a lot of sorghum cane planted this year.

* * * * *
There will be want and hunger in the cities this winter. There should be none here. General Lee's army in the last desperate months before the surrender lived almost entirely upon corn. We will have plenty of corn and apples. We will have cabbage. We'll eat.

There are three men sitting on a fall night on the courthouse steps in Marion, Virginia. Their talk is all of the fields and the crops. Men have gathered together on fall evenings and talked of the same thing for thousands of years.

* * * * *
The harvest moon is waning now. Nights are getting colder. Cider-making, apple-picking,

corn-cutting, wheat-planting, syrup-making, frost in the air.⁷

For thousands of years the annual cycle has repeated itself over and over, attaining full glory in the autumn harvest, and the pagan worship of nature would still have found justification enough in modern Marion.

It did, in fact, still find expression in the country fair, a far from modern celebration of the harvest season. Concerning one of his favorite events, Anderson writes,

The fair is an institution as old as mankind. When Caesar went up into the wilds of Germany he found towns and villages there in the forests. Annual fairs were held there, among the wild men in the German forests, as they are held in American towns today. Well there were the broad-shouldered wild men of the forests riding their wild horses. There were exhibits too. The horse traders were there.

The same thing going on in far China and Tibet. Marco Polo, the first great traveler, speaks of the fairs of the far east.

And on the Russian Steppes and in cold Siberia other fairs being held.⁸

Anderson continues the article with a description of the Marion fair, concluding with the exclamation, "Lives there a man with soul so dead--who never to himself has said-- 'What Ho!--for the fair.'" According to Anderson, the autumn fair was a time for all men to let loose and give

⁷Return, pp. 200-3. See also "O! Marion," Return, pp. 104-5, and "Fine Hunting Weather," Towns, p. 37.

⁸"The Fair," Towns, pp. 263-65.

in to primitive impulse. Shortly after his sojourn in Marion, the author published a small book titled The American County Fair in which he describes men who " . . . are quiet respectable men at other times during the year, excepting only in the fall when the fairs are being held,"⁹ Elsewhere in the little book, he speaks of the fair as something special and claims that "in spite of all the talk about improving agriculture, etc., it is a pagan outbreak" (p. 5). Had Anderson been concerned with justifying some of the wild impulses which tend to strike so many of his fictional characters in the fall, he could have used the county fair as an example in fact.

He often did mix fact and fancy and would occasionally treat his newspaper subscribers to a short story. One of these stories, "A Mountain Dance," is probably one of his most obvious uses of fall as an antagonist. Again the season is linked to the pagan, and in this instance, becomes the instigator behind what resembles a primitive fertility dance. The main character Poly, on a cold November evening,

. . . began to grow restless. Winter was coming on. The winters are long and cold in the mountains. He was wishing for a wife. . . .

⁹Sherwood Anderson, The American County Fair (New York: Random House, 1930), p. 6.

He told me that, as he was sitting by the fireside, the old people having crawled into bed, he grew suddenly restless.

He sprang up and went out of doors. There was a new moon but it did not shed much light. A cold wind blew and in the air there was the promise of snow, the first snow of the winter. Ragged clouds were drifting across the sky.

Later when the snow is deep these mountain cabins are sometimes isolated for weeks at a time.

It is a bad time of the year for a young strong man to be unmarried.

Poly felt that. He was nervous. As he stood by the cabin door the wind whistled through the dry leaves of the oak trees. The oak leaves cling to the trees all winter in our hills.

The wind blowing, the mournful sound of the wind in the trees, the promise of snow in the air, had in some way suggested to Poly's mind the idea that it would be a fine night for a dance. I got from him, when he was talking to me, the notion that the wind had suggested the thought to him. It may just have been the dry leaves dancing on the limbs of the trees.

Evidently the dancing leaves had also suggested the idea to others. The leaves in the trees beside his cabin door were dancing madly, then becoming quiet, then dancing again.

He told me that the noise made by the wind, playing in the dead dry leaves, was like the sound of a fiddle.

Anyway Poly was standing there, like that, and suddenly he began to run up hill through the woods.

* * * * *

And so that night when Poly wanted to dance and when snow was promised and the wind was roaring in the trees, he ran through the woods to her father's house.

* * * * *

There had been nothing arranged, but when he got there others from other isolated cabins in the hills began to arrive.

He suggested to me, without saying words, that he thought the night had been a little crazy and that all the people of the hills were a little crazy.¹⁰

¹⁰"A Mountain Dance," Towns, pp. 43-44.

There can be no doubt here as to the part played by the season, and the dialogue of the wind in the dry leaves is the same heard over and over again in many of Anderson's fictional tales. That the dialogue calls the mountain people together for a type of fertility dance expands the pagan significance of the season to include the concept of rejuvenation--a time of preparation for new birth and the continuation of the cycle.

As much as Anderson loved the autumn and as much as he found to praise in it, he was also susceptible to the melancholy of the season--the very same sadness of the season which he denies the poet. In "Late September Days" he speaks with a touch of the poet's melancholy:

Always a touch of sadness at this time of the year. You hoped and planned so much for this year. "What, is another year going? What have I got done this year?"

On the hillside the maples are already turned or are turning. Veins of red, like blood, run through the leaves. Soon all the mountainsides will be glorious with color.

The people who come into our country for the summer lose the best and sweetest of it by going away too soon.

The corn-cutting is started. It is going to be heavy work in many parts of the country. The heavy rain and winds have got the corn down--a tangled mess.

* * * * *
After the corn is cut and in shock I always see it as an army standing in the fields--to drive away the grim wolves of want during the winter ahead.

The cold nights now make you sleep hard. In the morning the sun seems sleepy-headed. It does not want to get up.!!

¹¹ Return, pp. 122-23.

While the old love is still evident, it now carries tones of bittersweet, the description of the leaves suggesting the blood of a dying year and the tangled corn blamed on the heavy temper of the season. Here too is the nostalgia for old dreams, the questioning, the dread, which, for many Anderson characters, would hold the seeds of an epiphany.

In the article "Fall" Anderson again describes the coming of autumn in tones of regret and speaks of his own fears and apprehensions:

The change from summer to fall comes as suddenly and as subtly as the change in a child, that becomes suddenly no longer a child.

Fall is here. The summer is gone. There is a new feeling in the sky, in the trees, in the grass under foot.

The summer went away like a bird that flies into a bush. There may be hot sunshiny days yet, but they will be fall days. With this writer it came after the rain that wiped out the last two days of our fair. They had but one horse race on Thursday. The trotters came out but the mud was too deep for them.

Some runners came out and ran, slashing through the mud. It was as though they were throwing summer out from their flying heels.

Then three days of solid rain. A cold clear day, a gray day and then more rain. Summer was having a hard time getting away. The gray clouds were a cloak, concealing her departure.

She is gone now. It is fall. It can be a glorious time in this country but it is not summer.

Alas, this editor was born poor. Winter is ahead. As a child the coming of winter always brought fear of cold and hunger. The old dread holds. In contemplation of winter I am always afraid.¹²

¹²Towns, pp. 300-1.

This rendering again emphasizes the darker aspects of the season, depicting heavy rains and gray skies. The opening metaphor conjures images of old age, and the closing lines contemplate winter death. The season once praised for its generosity is now become unfriendly, and the fear of want and hunger dulls its glory.

In yet other articles, this aspect of autumn becomes even stronger and uglier. In its strength it is as much the antagonist as the brighter side of the season, speaking through the rain as its opposite communicates through the rustling leaves. The rain, however, usually excites depression:

Rain, rain and more rain. The corn is down.
Fall work is held up. The fair in Tazewell was
spoiled. It happened again in Marion, the last two
days, and no doubt will happen in Galax.

People on the street are restless and depressed.
We all respond to weather more than we know. It is
a time to be patient with each other, as gentle as
we can be.

A dozen men have told me that they wanted to
go away. They are restless under the gray clouds.
It is at such times that men sometimes do dark evil
things or think dark evil thoughts.

Life should be gay. It cannot be sometimes.
I have had people speak sometimes of my own gayety
when inside I was so depressed I spoke with diffi-
culty.

And I knew they were speaking of my own appar-
ent gayety because they were depressed. It is so
difficult to help each other out. Almost every one
does foolish things for which he has to pay.

I wish it were possible for me to be the friend
of all men but I cannot be. I am like every one
else, too much absorbed in myself.

Every one walking about--isolated figures.
The gray days following each other--rain, rain and
then more rain.¹³

Here the fall rain is cited as the direct cause of restlessness and depression--a state of agitation often resulting in impulsive and foolish acts. Just as the townspeople express a desire to go away, many of Anderson's fictional characters actually attempt an escape under similar conditions. The parallel also holds true for various desperate and foolish acts prompted by the fall rains. One extreme example is seen in the case of the drifter who murders his wife, probably an imagined story, written for the papers:

"I was in the field above the house," he said again. "It was depressing weather. I was husking corn and it began to rain.

"When I had got through work it was almost dark and I started home. I was coming down a muddy lane beside a wood.

"The leaves had all fallen off the trees in the wood." When he told me that simple fact he smiled a sickly smile. What he thought was funny about it I don't know.

The leaves had fallen off the trees and there were wet leaves clinging to his shoes.

.....
He spoke again of the evening--after his marriage--when he had been husking corn. It was night, and rainy and dark.¹⁴

¹³"It Rains," Towns, pp. 297-98.

¹⁴"Among the Drifters," Towns, pp. 218-21.

In the drifter's own account of the murder, the dark rainy night plays a significant role and is emphasized in Anderson's later repetition. The combination of rain and leaves is also deserving of the author's comment, and he now speaks of the usually dancing leaves as clinging leaves. The rustling voice of the season is now stilled and its mouthpiece becomes a portent of evil, or even an accomplice, as the sickly smile of the drifter seems to indicate. Although few Anderson characters are actually driven to murder, they are often accompanied in their more desperate actions by just such a night.

Whether in his imagination or in his actual observation of everyday life, the autumnal season existed as a powerful force for the author, and his newspaper articles provide a particularly rich account of its significance. Here are found Anderson's own reactions to the season, contradictory but consistent with his use of the season as a dual personality. In pagan terms of fertility and abundance or in images of old age and death, the season agitates Anderson's real neighbors as it does his imagined friends.

CHAPTER IV. THE FICTION

I would like to be a dead dry thing....I would like to be a leaf blown away by the wind....I would like to be dead and blown by the wind over limitless waters.

Sherwood Anderson, "Brothers"

Although the stories of Anderson's imagination may be richly adorned by any of the four seasons, it is the autumnal season which most often takes the leading role in the crucial scene. The role may be either active or passive, a reflector of the action or an instigator. Numerous variations occur, but the basic tone of the season is always one of agitation and restlessness. More often than not this tone is a preamble to epiphany.

The most common Anderson epiphany is centered around the theme of escape, and the need for escape is most often recognized in the fall. This is particularly true in the case of stifling marriage relationships where the main character comes to recognize the relationship as a trap and flees, or at least effects a protest.

The novel Many Marriages, the story of John Webster's escape from his wife and his job, is set in the fall and links his initial restlessness directly to that season. Webster's restlessness is not born of years of discontent but comes upon him suddenly in the fall of middle age:

And so there was this Webster, drawing near to his fortieth year, and his daughter had just

graduated from the town high school. It was early fall and he seemed to be going along and living his life about as usual and then this thing happened to him.

Down within his body something began to affect him like an illness. It is a little hard to describe the feeling he had. It was as though something were being born. Had he been a woman he might have suspected he had suddenly become pregnant. There he sat in his office at work or walked about in the streets of his town and he had the most amazing feeling of not being himself, but something new and quite strange. Sometimes the feeling of not being himself became so strong in him that he stopped suddenly in the streets and stood looking and listening.¹

The thing born in John Webster that fall is an awareness of life's many possibilities, and he sees those possibilities in the flaming autumn colors;

As John Webster walked along the street the sun was shining and as there was a light breeze a few leaves were falling from the maple shade trees with which the streets were lined. Soon there would be frost and the trees would be all afire with color. If one could only be aware, glorious days were ahead. Even in the Wisconsin town one might have glorious days. There was a little pang of hunger, a new kind of hunger, within him as he stopped and stood for a moment looking up and down the residence street on which he had been walking. (p. 35)

Webster's thoughts of the glorious days ahead echo Anderson's own words about the Virginia falls and his letter of 1917. The vitality of the season is emphasized, and Webster's own sleeping vitality is awakened. His

¹Sherwood Anderson, Many Marriages (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923), p. 4. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

restlessness stems not from a fear of old age and death, but from a sudden recognition of his prime:

It was fall and nearly time for frost to come, but there was still new life in the grass. How green the grass was in the little park! The trees were alive too. Soon now they would flame with color and then sleep for a period. To all the world of living green things there would come the flame of evening and then the night of winter.

Out before the world of animal life the fruits of the earth would be poured. Out of the ground they would come, off trees and bushes, out of the seas, lakes, and rivers, the things that were to maintain animal life during the period when the world of vegetable life slept the sweet sleep of winter.

It was a thing to think about too. Everywhere, all about him must be men and women who lived altogether unaware of such things. To tell the truth he had himself been, all his life, unaware. He had just eaten food, stuffed it into his body through his mouth. There had been no joy. He had not really tasted things, smelled things. How filled with fragrant suggestive smells life might be! (p. 43)

The "flame of evening" and the pouring forth of the earth's fruits are somehow responsible for and characteristic of Webster's sudden impulse to give himself to life. The abundance of the season seems to arouse the flame of life in Webster and suggests the possibility of abundance in his own life:

In bed he lay with eyes open listening to the night noises from without the house. They were not very plain. He had forgotten to open the window. When he had done that a low humming sound arose. The first frost had not come yet and the night was warm. In the garden owned by the German, in the grass in his own back-yard, in the branches of the trees along the streets and far off in the country there was life abundant.

Perhaps Natalie would have a child. It did not matter. They would go away together, live together in some distant place. (p. 71)

Here the abundance of the season is virtually whispering to Webster, reinforcing his decision to flee with Natalie to a fuller life.

The flight with Natalie is both sexual and spiritual, and on both levels is colored by seasonal implications. Webster's initial approach to Natalie is a sexual one and represents a renewal of his potency. Although he mentions in the preceding quote that it is unimportant whether or not she will have a child, his elaborate preparation for leaving with her is a strange fertility rite directed toward the child he already has. His desperate attempt to awaken his daughter to the possibilities of life takes the form of a ritual in which he paces nude in the candlelight before a picture of The Virgin. Only when he feels he has successfully awakened his daughter to a desire for the abundant life is he able to leave with Natalie. The old pagan fertility rite is necessary to his escape and the perpetuation of life outside himself, yet of himself. The pagan implications are, by no means, new to Anderson and have already been mentioned in chapter three as they relate to the journalistic writings about fall--the season of renewal and preparation for new life.

Webster's homespun fertility rite is but a natural outgrowth of his marked attention to the life-giving forces of the season.

Webster's new awareness of life gives him a certain kinship with Nature. During this time he takes many walks in the country, and on one such outing, "for two hours he sat on a log looking at the trees now flaming with color. The sun shone brightly and after a time the squirrels and birds became less conscious of his presence and the animal and bird life that had been stilled by his coming was renewed" (p. 84). Of a similar nature is his spiritual attraction to Natalie, who "when she does not understand she believes. There is something in her that accepts life as these trees do" (p. 84). Although Natalie plays a very passive role throughout the book, her simple acceptance of life is most appropriate to Webster's own mood and makes her a likely vehicle for his escape. The terms acceptance and escape may seem contradictory, but Webster's escape is actually an escape into life--a flight from the puritanical avoidance of life to the acceptance of life and all it has to offer. This acceptance of life is reflected in both Natalie and the season: "Every day he took a long walk in the country, sat under trees, wandered in woodland paths and in the evening walked in silence beside Natalie, also in the country. The days

marched past in quiet fall splendor. There was a kind of sweet new responsibility in just being alive when one felt so alive" (p. 89). The emptiness of former relationships, marriage and job, is finally abandoned for the new and fuller life with Natalie and Nature. In her flaming dress Nature is really more the temptress than Natalie in her passivity. The season is an active, vital force, tempting Webster toward life.

In a more passive role the autumnal season appears again in Dark Laughter as the setting for two more escapes from the stagnant marriage relationship. While the season does not seem to be directly culpable for Bruce Dudley's final break with his wife, Anderson states clearly that he " . . . left his wife on a certain fall evening. He sat in the darkness for an hour or two and then got his hat and went out of the house."² Dudley's discontent and his resentment of the relationship had evidently been festering for some time, but that the final break came so suddenly that autumn evening is significant. Although the season remains in the background, the nature of Dudley's emotion is strangely reminiscent of Webster's, and in the words of his own

²Sherwood Anderson, Dark Laughter (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), p. 59. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

personality he expresses a similar desire for life: "I'm setting out on a little voyage of discovery. I've a notion that Myself is a land few men know about. I thought I'd take a little trip into myself, look around a little there. God knows what I'll find. The idea excites me, that's all. I'm thirty-four and my wife and I have no kids. I guess I'm a primitive man, a voyager, eh?" (pp. 61-62). Dudley is nowhere close to Webster's sensitivity and awareness, yet he is stirred by a similar excitement, at a similar age, in the season of restlessness.

In the final episode of Dark Laughter the autumnal season reappears, attendant to a second marital break. Book Eleven begins, "late in the evening of a fall day" (p. 273), and presents a rather ironic view of the abandoned marriage partner. Fred Grey walks toward disaster, feeling a strange mixture of triumph and fear. The clear fall night is a deceptive stimulant to his sense of triumph, being at the same time a silent witness to his wife's escape. Exulted because of what he sees as a brilliant future with the expansion of his business and the yet unborn child he believes to be his own, Fred walks slowly in order to enjoy the beauty of the evening: "How fine that night was! At a street corner where there

was a light he looked at his watch. Eleven o'clock. He passed on into a darker space between lights. By looking straight ahead up the hill he could see the blue-black sky sprinkled with brilliant stars. He experiences a strange excitement, "oddly like a happy bridegroom and a happy bridegroom likes the night" (p. 276). How ironic that he is soon to be not a bridegroom but an abandoned husband. Disquieting thoughts begin to intrude upon his sense of triumph, and when he overhears his wife and Bruce, his recognition lacks surprise:

For him then the night was to be a beginning
and an end. A man gets himself placed in life,
all is settled, everything is going well, unpleasant
things of the past are forgotten, the future is
rosy--and then--What a man wants is to be let alone.
If life would only flow straight on, like a river.

I am building me a house, slowly,
A house in which I may live.

It is evening and my house is in ruins,
Weeds and vines have grown in the broken walls.
(pp. 292-93)

For Fred the recognition comes too late, and the evening of his life is filled with the regret of what might have been rather than the flame of future possibilities which flared for Webster and Dudley. It is, however, the same season, the evening of the year, which accompanies recognition for all three.

A similar evening is represented in Windy McPherson's Son when Sam McPherson betrays his wife for money and

progress. Sam's escape from the marriage relationship differs in that it is a flight from the feeling and sensitivity of a human relationship into the cold mechanical world of machines. The sharp clear air of the fall evening is something of an intruder here, in tune with Sam's noble promise to his wife but quickly drowned out by the roar of the machines:

"All right, Sue girl, I will do it," he said, and pushed her through the door. "Now let me sit down by myself and think things out."

It was a night in September and a whisper of the coming frost was in the air. He threw up the window and took long breaths of the sharp air and listened to the rumble of the elevated road in the distance. Looking up the boulevard he saw the lights of the cyclists making a glistening stream that flowed past the house. A thought of his new motor car and of all of the wonder of the mechanical progress of the world ran through his mind.

"The men who make machines do not hesitate," he said to himself; "even though a thousand fat-hearted men stood in their way they would go on."³

Just as Sam seems to become human with a heart of his own, he succumbs to the voices of the machines and the whisper of the season is lost. Likewise, Sam's recognition of life is lost until another fall.

In the short story, appropriately named "The Door to the Trap," Hugh Walker comes to recognize marriage as a trap but is unable to effect an escape. His rather feeble

³Sherwood Anderson, Windy McPherson's Son (1916; rpt. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 231.

protest is, however, enacted in the fall. Mary Cochran, the young college girl who joins the family at Hugh's invitation, is as a young tree, symbolic of life to him. He is attracted to her youth and freedom because they awaken a dormant energy within himself. Yet, as she is gradually absorbed into the family, he sees the young tree becoming more and more like his wife who lives her life only through books. His sudden outburst one fall day is a cry for life, too late for himself and his wife but a warning to the young girl:

And then quite suddenly and unexpectedly Hugh's silence, that had lasted all through his married life, was broken up. He walked homeward with a German who had the chair of modern languages in the school and got into a violent quarrel. He stopped to speak to men on the street. When he went to putter about in the garden he whistled and sang.

One afternoon in the fall he came home and found the whole family assembled in the living room of the house. The children were playing on the floor and the negress sat in the chair by the window with his youngest child in her arms, crooning one of the negro songs. Mary Cochran was there. She sat reading a book.

Hugh walked directly toward her and looked over her shoulder. At that moment Winifred came into the room. He reached forward and snatched the book out of the girl's hands. She looked up startled. With an oath he threw it into the fire that burned in an open grate at the side of the room. A flood of words ran from him. He cursed books and people and schools. "Damn it all," he said. "What makes you want to read about life? What makes people want to think about life? Why don't they live?"⁴

⁴Sherwood Anderson, The Triumph of the Egg: A Book of Impressions from American Life in Tales and Poems (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921), pp. 129-30.

Evidently, this is very unusual behavior for Walker, and his plea for life is soon explained away. He is not even successful in his warning to Mary Cochran, although he does eventually drive her away so that he will not be responsible for her final imprisonment. Walker slips back into his own prison and his old habit of silence. That his agitated outbreak comes in the fall is only in keeping with Anderson's use of this season at the point of crisis.

Other examples of the thwarted attempt at escape, the futile cry for life, are seen in Winesburg, Ohio. Winesburg is the story of the grotesques who exist within a variety of private prisons. Best explained in the metaphor of the twisted apples, they also belong to the autumnal season:

In the fall one walks in the orchards and the ground is hard with frost underfoot. The apples have been taken from the trees by the pickers. They have been put in barrels and shipped to the cities where they will be eaten in apartments that are filled with books, magazines, furniture, and people. On the trees are only a few gnarled apples that the pickers have rejected. They look like the knuckles of Doctor Reefy's hands. One nibbles at them and they are delicious. Into a little round place at the side of the apple has been gathered all of its sweetness. One runs from tree to tree over the frosted ground picking the gnarled, twisted apples and filling his pockets with them. Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples.⁵

Only a very few know the sweetness of the grotesques

⁵Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, ed. Malcolm Cowley and John H. Ferres (1919; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 36. — All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

because they are isolated by their inability to communicate. For many of the grotesques the autumn is a season of desperation which drives them to attempt escape from their isolation, reaching for life and understanding outside themselves.

Such is the experience of Alice Hindman in the story "Adventure." Alice waits eleven years for the return of the young man who has promised to marry her. Although she eventually begins to walk in silence with the drug clerk, she lives her life in dreams, drawing more and more into herself until

. . . the early fall of her twenty-seventh year a passionate restlessness took possession of Alice. She could not bear to be in the company of the drug clerk, and when, in the evening, he came to walk with her she sent him away. Her mind became intensely active and when, weary from the long hours of standing behind the counter in the store, she went home and crawled into bed, she could not sleep. With staring eyes she looked into the darkness. Her imagination, like a child awakened from long sleep, played about the room. Deep within her there was something that would not be cheated by phantasies and that demanded some definite answer from life. (p. 118)

Again, the restlessness and the hunger for life appear in the fall and force the character to recognition. In this particular instance, the fall rain takes an active role as antagonist, driving Alice's restlessness to desperation:

Alice went upstairs to her room and undressed in the darkness. For a moment she stood by the window hearing the rain beat against the glass and

then a strange desire took possession of her. Without stopping to think of what she intended to do, she ran downstairs through the dark house and out into the rain. As she stood on the little grass plot before the house and felt the cold rain on her body a mad desire to run naked through the streets took possession of her.

She thought that the rain would have some creative and wonderful effect on her body. Not for years had she felt so full of youth and courage. She wanted to leap and run, to cry out, to find some other lonely human and embrace him. On the brick sidewalk before the house a man stumbled homeward. Alice started to run. A wild, desperate mood took possession of her. "What do I care who it is. He is alone, and I will go to him," she thought; and then without stopping to consider the possible result of her madness, called softly. "Wait!" she cried. "Don't go away. Whoever you are, you must wait." (p. 119)

Here the raindrops are the voice of the season, calling Alice into their midst to seek in desperation the life she has already allowed to pass her by. The realization comes too late for Alice, and she must now " . . . face bravely the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg" (p. 120).

Enoch Robinson in the story "Loneliness" is another of these lonely Winesburg citizens who attempts to communicate his loneliness on a fall evening. Like many of the grotesques in Winesburg, Enoch singles out the young reporter George Willard and seeks human understanding of his loneliness. The choice of George as a listener, in Enoch's case, is directly determined by the season:

He wanted to talk to someone, and he chose the young newspaper reporter because the two happened to be thrown together at a time when the

younger man was in a mood to understand.

Youthful sadness, young man's sadness, the sadness of a growing boy in a village at the year's end, opened the lips of the old man. The sadness was in the heart of George Willard and was without meaning, but it appealed to Enoch Robinson." (p. 173)

The season is responsible for the mood of both men, and it is the sadness of the season which brings them out to walk in the rain:

It rained on the evening when the two met and talked, a drizzly wet October rain. The fruition of the year had come and the night should have been fine with a moon in the sky and the crisp sharp promise of frost in the air, but it wasn't that way. It rained and little puddles of water shone under the street lamps on Main Street. In the woods in the darkness beyond the Fair Ground water dripped from the black trees. Beneath the trees wet leaves were pasted against tree roots that protruded from the ground. In gardens back of houses in Winesburg dry shriveled potato vines lay sprawling on the ground. Men who had finished the evening meal and who had planned to go uptown to talk the evening away with other men at the back of some store changed their minds. George Willard tramped about in the rain and was glad that it rained. He felt that way. He was like Enoch Robinson on the evenings when the old man came down out of his room and wandered alone in the streets. (p. 174)

Enoch and George are touched by the darker side of autumn. The wet leaves, pasted to the roots of the trees, indicate a crippling of the life force which is so often communicated through the sound of the leaves dancing on the wind. The image is also indicative of Enoch's pitiable attempt to escape his loneliness; all he ever asks is understanding. That he elicits even a semblance of understanding

from George is due to the mood instilled in the young man by the autumnal season.

Also in the fall Elmer Cowley, in the story "Queer," approaches George Willard in search of another type of understanding. Although the season acts only as a background in this story, its appearance at the peak of Elmer's frustration is significant. Elmer has long been obsessed with the notion that the town is laughing at himself and his family. One day in the fall, however, "the fury of the young man became uncontrollable. 'I won't stand it,' he yelled, looking up at the bare branches of the trees. 'I'm not made to stand it'" (p. 197). Again the vitality of the rustling leaves is missing and the ominous nature of the season is emphasized in the bare branches. Elmer does escape from Winesburg that "cold November evening" (p. 198), but is still nowhere near escaping from his own paranoia. His paranoia, in fact, is amplified in his attempt to tell George Willard that he isn't queer. Unable to speak, his frustration intensifies until he ends in striking the young reporter to the ground. He then jumps aboard a flat car, feeling that he has made George understand that "I ain't so queer" (p. 201). Of course his actions only prove the opposite, and Elmer's new life promises to be as bleak and lonely as the naked trees.

Fortunately, all fall days in Winesburg are not so bleak, and the brilliant autumn leaves have their stories, too. In "The Untold Lie" Ray Pearson is touched by one of the brighter fall days. The season again stirs discontent and restlessness and brings a moment of youth back to the old farm hand. One day late in October Ray "was in a sad, distracted mood and was affected by the beauty of the country. If you knew the Winesburg country in the fall and how the low hills are all splashed with yellows and reds you would understand his feeling. He began to think of the time, long ago when he was a young fellow living with his father, then a baker in Winesburg, and how on such days he had wandered away to the woods to gather nuts, hunt rabbits, or just to loaf about and smoke his pipe" (p. 204). He sees himself in young Hal Winters, about to be forced into marriage, and he begins to resent the trap of such responsibility. Ray's resentment is agitated by the beauty of the dying year, and "every time he raised his eyes and saw the beauty of the country in the falling light he wanted to do something he had never done before, shout or scream or hit his wife with his fists or something equally unexpected and terrifying" (p. 206).

In the evening Ray's agitation is heightened by the wash of autumn color, and the life and vitality of the

season lead him scampering across the fields as if he were a young man again:

It was just growing dark and the scene that lay before him was lovely. All the low hills were washed with color and even the little clusters of bushes in the corners by the fences were alive with beauty. The whole world seemed to Ray Pearson to have become alive with something just as he and Hal had suddenly become alive when they stood in the corn field staring into each other's eyes.

The beauty of the country about Winesburg was too much for Ray on that fall evening. That is all there was to it. He could not stand it. Of a sudden he forgot all about being a quiet old farm hand and throwing off the torn overcoat began to run across the field. As he ran he shouted a protest against his life, against all life, against everything that makes life ugly. (p. 207)

Ray's protest is sad, but not desperate. It is a protest for the beautiful in life, but as darkness covers the hills, Ray seems to realize that his life has had its beautiful moments, too. Even though his life has been a difficult one, Ray is not so sure he would live it differently if given the chance.

"Godliness," the story of young David Hardy, is another story of autumn leaves. A story told in four parts, the fall leaves appear twice to accompany David in his attempts to escape the wardens of his childhood, first his mother and then his grandfather. When David flees from his mother, "it was early dusk of a fall evening and the sky was overcast with clouds. Something happened to David. He could not bear to go into the house where his

mother and father lived, and on an impulse he decided to run away from home" (p. 76). His escape, like most fall flights, is sudden and impulsive. David, however, is very young and his view of freedom becomes vast and terrifying: "The boy's imagination was excited and he fancied that he could see and hear strange things in the darkness. Into his mind came the conviction that he was walking and running in some terrible void where no one had ever been before. The darkness about him seemed limitless. The sound of the wind blowing in trees was terrifying" (p. 76).

Here the season is almost cruel in its forcefulness, and the wind is accompanied by rain and lightning, driving David back to the arms of a neurotic mother. His final escape from the mother is effected through the grandfather who is himself another type of neurotic.

The grandfather takes David to live with him on his farm, and here the boy grows to maturity in the fall of his fifteenth year:

In the fall of that year when the frost came and the trees in the forests along Wine Creek were golden brown, David spent every moment when he did not have to attend school, out in the open. Alone or with other boys he went every afternoon into the woods to gather nuts. The other boys of the countryside, most of them sons of laborers on the Bentley farms, had guns with which they went hunting rabbits and squirrels, but David did not go with them. He made himself a sling with rubber bands and a forked stick and went off by himself to gather nuts. As he went about thought came to him. He realized

that he was almost a man and wondered what he would do in life, but before they came to anything, the thoughts passed and he was a boy again. (p. 98)

This time the season is friendly and gentle with David, in tune with his intermittent glimpse of maturity.

In this same season, the grandfather is exulted by the success of his crops and is once again obsessed with the notion that he is a man of God. On a cloudy fall day he takes David with him into the forest to make a sacrifice to God and succeeds only in terrifying the boy and driving him out into the world of men. This time David does not return.

George Willard, Winesburg's hero, also finds maturity in the autumn. The story "Sophistication" is George's story, but it also contains the epiphany of the entire book. George's recognition of life contains the reality and possibility lacking in the frustrated epiphanies of the other Winesburg characters. The epiphany which he shares with Helen White is the outgrowth of a sad, restless evening in the fall.

The story begins in the "early evening of a day in the late fall and the Winesburg County Fair had brought crowds of country people into town. The day had been clear and the night came on warm and pleasant. On the Triunion Pike, where the road after it left town stretched

away between berry fields now covered with dry brown leaves, the dust from passing wagons arose in clouds" (p. 233).

The season is first to be introduced and continues to pervade the story in both movement and imagery. On this particular evening George is lonely and moody, possessed by a sadness which calls out for understanding:

The sadness of sophistication has come to the boy. With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellow he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun. He shivers and looks eagerly about. The eighteen years he has lived seem but a moment, a breathing space in the long march of humanity. Already he hears death calling. With all his heart he wants to come close to some other human, touch someone with his hands, be touched by the hand of another. If he prefers that the other be a woman, that is because he believes that a woman will be gentle, that she will understand. He wants, most of all, understanding. (pp. 234-35)

George's sadness is the same sadness which led Enoch Robinson to approach him on another fall evening, but now it is clearly defined. George identifies with the leaves of the season and envisions death as a part of his own destiny.

As with the grotesques of Winesburg, George's autumnal mood demands understanding, and he sets out to find Helen White who is, in the meantime, touched by a similar restlessness. When the two finally meet and go off together, the season follows at their heels: "With hanging heads

they walked away along the street under the trees. Dry leaves rustled under foot" (p. 239). Although they walk and find their understanding in silence, the season continues to influence their mood as the wind flickers the flame of a distant fire and rustles the dry leaves in the corn field. This time the understanding is real and deep, and "for some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together the thing needed. Man or boy, woman or girl, they had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible" (p. 243). Whatever they take hold of, whether it is the acceptance of human limitation or the mutual understanding of two human beings, the season is instrumental in evoking the mood which allows them to grasp that maturity.⁶

George Willard's epiphany of maturity sets the tone for a second type of Anderson epiphany which realizes life beyond the escape in the acceptance of life and human relationships. Although an epiphany of this type may include an escape of sorts, its most important mark is a strong desire to give, to make a meaningful contribution

⁶For a lesser but similar epiphany of maturity occurring in the fall see Sherwood Anderson, "The Sad Hornblowers," Horses and Men: Tales, Long and Short from our American Life (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923), pp. 245-83.

to humanity. This epiphany, too, is reserved for the fall.

The most susceptible to such an epiphany is the adventurer who exists in a whirlwind of success, money, and fame. Kit Brandon, from the novel of that name, is the notorious lady bootlegger who has little need for human sentiment. She is a hard woman who asks little from her fellow humans and gives as little in return. Even her marriage is closer to a business arrangement than a human relationship.

When Kit is finally drawn to a realization of her own place in the human family, it is the result of a series of episodes, all occurring in the fall. The first episode takes place on a very clear, still fall night when Kit is made to see the brutality of her fellow adventurers. The moon is so bright that she has no need for a flashlight and the silence so intense that she hears only the insects and a distant hoot owl. It is as if the night were in a conspiracy to make her the more aware. What she sees that night is Tom Halsey's cruel use of the impressionable young Alfred Weathersmythe as an assassin, and "for the first time in her life she hated sincerely, wholly."⁷

Her hatred is an outgrowth of her feeling for the young

⁷Sherwood Anderson, Kit Brandon: A Portrait (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 310. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

man whom she follows and cradles in her arms, a maternal scene which leaves Kit with a sense of confusion.

After the incident, Kit confines herself to her hotel room and thinks out her confusion. Suddenly the importance of adventure begins to fade and she decides that "even in prison there might be something. There might be some women there who would become her friends. She had a terrible need . . . it growing in her . . . of something . . . a relationship . . . some man or some woman, to whom she could feel close. Just at that time she had . . . it was she felt the strongest thing in her . . . the hunger to give" (pp. 322-23). Throughout the remainder of the novel, this desire intensifies.

Kit becomes restless and moody, looking for escape until she is unexpectedly released by Tom Halsey's death. In this episode the night is dark

. . . with rain threatening and she could see nothing. A wind, such a sudden wind as often precedes a rain, came up and she could hear it in the branches of the trees in the apple orchard back of the house. She did not know afterwards how long she waited thus. It may have been but for a minute. There was only the sound of the sudden wind in the trees and then, from the orchard and from the road in front of the house, there came the sound of shots and she could see the little sputter of light made by the discharge of guns. (p. 339)

The restless movement of the season is here indicative of change, and Kit's ensuing release is almost a metamorphosis

reflected in her reaction to the following autumn morning:

She had come out of the wood and got into the road, this in the early morning. She had looked carefully about. There was no one in sight. What a clear sweet morning! The wood into which she had got on the evening before was on a high plateau. It was fall and the leaves on the trees in the wood and on the other strips of woodland beyond were turning yellow and red but they had not begun to fall. She stood looking about. It was just such a country as that in which she had lived as a child, the same great hills going away, little farms stuck on hill-sides. She was in the Appalachian hill country, her own country. On the night before, in the police car, she had driven blindly, not thinking, not caring where she went. There had been just the mad desire to get away from Tom, from Gordon . . . yes and from Kate. "I want something new now." The feeling common to thousands of young men and women in a civilization dominated by commercialism. "I want to do some work that has some meaning." (p. 344)

The indication in the final episode is that Kit has a good chance of finding that meaning. When she is able to give understanding to Tom Hanaford in a human relationship, "she felt warm and alive. Young Hanaford had done that for her. She had been carried out of herself and her own problem and into the life of another puzzled human" (p. 373). As in the case of George Willard, Kit's epiphany implies a meaningful solution.

A similar solution is also found in the epiphany of the young business tycoon, Sam McPherson who leaves his business to become a truth seeking wanderer. His wanderings cover a space of several years and encompass a number

of minor fall epiphanies.⁸ Each of these proves false but leads him closer to his final truth. The final truth is also realized in the autumn when Sam returns to his wife with the three stray children. His intent is to build a meaningful family and to seek his truth in the business of living with other human beings:

"I cannot run away from life. I must face it. I must begin to try to understand these other lives, to love," he told himself. The buried inner thing in him thrust itself up.

How still the night had become. In the tree beneath which he stood a bird moved on some slender branch and there was a faint rustling of leaves. The darkness before and behind was a wall through which he must in some way manage to thrust himself into the light. With his hand before him, as though trying to push aside some dark blinding mass, he moved out of the grove and thus stumbled up the steps and into the house. (p. 330)

Here the novel closes with Sam's resolution to love and understand, applauded by the autumn leaves.

Poor White also ends with a family portrait, this time illuminated by the fall moonlight. This novel is the story of the famous inventor Hugh McVey, a kind and sensitive man separated from his fellow humans by his alliance with industrialism. Hugh's career begins in the fall, launched by a strange premonition of death and destruction:

Hugh thought his mind had gone out of his body and up into the sky to join the clouds and the stars,

⁸For details see Sherwood Anderson, Windy McPherson's Son, pp. 118-19, 251-54, 264, 272-74, and 275-76.

to play with them. From the sky he thought he looked down on the earth and saw rolling fields, hills and forests. He had no part in the lives of the men and women of the earth, but was torn away from them, left to stand by himself. From his place in the sky above the earth he saw the great river going majestically along. For a time it was quiet and contemplative as the sky had been when he was a boy down below lying on his belly in the wood. He saw men pass in boats and could hear their voices dimly. A great quiet prevailed and he looked abroad beyond the wide expanse of the river and saw fields and towns. They were all hushed and still. An air of waiting hung over them. And then the river was whipped into action by some strange force, something that had come out of a distant place, out of the place to which the cloud had gone and from which it had returned to stir and agitate the other clouds.

The river now went tearing along. It overflowed its banks and swept over the land, uprooting trees and forests and towns. The white faces of drowned men and children borne along by the flood, looked up into the mind's eye of the man Hugh, who, in the moment of his setting out into the definite world of struggle and defeat, had let himself slip back into the vaporous dreams of his boyhood.⁹

Here the season speaks through the agitated clouds and Hugh sees himself apart from the flow of humanity and, in some way, responsible for its destruction. Although he senses the agitation, he does not fully realize the meaning of the vision until, years later, it has already become a reality. The attack of the harness maker, insane from his defeat at the hands of industrialism, calls Hugh back to the drowned faces. Then, again in the fall, he realizes

⁹Sherwood Anderson, Poor White (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1920), pp. 28-29. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

the meaning of his vision and turns from his machines to a human relationship with his wife;

For perhaps ten minutes Clara and Hugh stood by the fence. The disease of thinking that was making Hugh useless for the work of his age had swept away many old things within him and he was not self-conscious in the presence of his woman. When she told him of the struggle of the man of another generation striving to be born he put his arm about her and held her close against his long body. For a time they stood in silence, and then started to return to the house and sleep. (p. 363)

The relationship, once so awkward, becomes natural and meaningful in the October moonlight.¹⁰

Red Oliver's end in Beyond Desire is a tragic version of the epiphany which realizes human relationships through the giving of oneself. Red is an unusual adventurer who wanders from his middle class background, by choice, into the ranks of the factory worker. In this role he is something of a misfit until the final autumn of the novel when he begins to think of settling down: "The scene there, the quiet barnyard, the woman standing there watching as a calf sucked a cow--the earth, smell of earth and water and bushes . . . now flaming with fall colors about Red . . . impulses that drove a man in life came and went in man . . . it would be nice, for example, to be a simple farm man, isolated from others, perhaps not thinking of others

¹⁰For one of Clara's epiphanic experiences, also in the fall moonlight, see Poor White, pp. 180-82.

. . . even though you were always poor . . . what did poverty matter?"¹¹ Although Red thinks here of isolation, he is also thinking in terms of a one to one relationship with another human being: "It was always the same thing. He wanted and couldn't get. If he once got, fully, his whole being merged with another . . . the birth of new life . . . something to strengthen him . . . would he be then a man at last?" (p. 307). But Red is never to realize this type of human relationship, and he awakens the next morning to Tar Moorehead's vision of death:

It was November of 1930.

Red Oliver stirred uneasily in sleep. He awoke and then slept again. There is a land between sleeping and waking--a land filled with grotesque shapes--and he was in that land. Things change swiftly and strangely there. It is a land of peace--and then of terror. Trees in that land become enlarged. They become shapeless and elongated. They come out of the ground and float away into the air. Desires come into the body of the sleeper.

Now you are yourself, but you are not yourself. You are outside yourself. You see yourself running along a beach . . . faster, faster, faster. (p. 245)

Red's gift to humanity is to be a tragic sacrifice of life as he steps forward to protest for the workers that same foggy autumn morning.

¹¹ Sherwood Anderson, Beyond Desire (New York: Liveright, Inc., 1932), p. 306. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition. For fall as an epiphanical influence on minor characters see pp. 14 and 70-89.

In another moment of sacrifice, Cracked McGregor rushes to the aid of the trapped miners in Marching Men. Observed by his young son Beaut, "he went from group to group among the people, his head hanging to one side. The boy looked at him intently. He was reminded of the October day on the eminence overlooking the fruitful valley and again he thought of his father as a man inspired, going through a kind of ceremony. The tall miner rubbed his hands up and down his legs, he peered into the faces of the silent men standing about, his lips moved and his red beard danced up and down."¹² The October day recalled to Beaut is a scene of realized human relationship for the father, shielding his young son from his fear of the autumnal season:

When the boy went again over the hill it was October and a cold wind blew down the hill into his face. In the woods golden brown leaves ran about like frightened little animals and golden-brown were the leaves on the trees about the farmhouses and golden-brown the corn standing shocked in the fields. The scene saddened the boy. A lump came into his throat and he wanted back the green shining beauty of the spring. He wished to hear the birds singing in the air and in the grass on the hillside.

Cracked McGregor was in another mood. He seemed more satisfied than on the first visit and ran up and down on the little eminence rubbing his hands together and on the legs of his trousers.

¹²Sherwood Anderson, Marching Men (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1917), pp. 21-22. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

Through the long afternoon he sat on the log muttering and smiling.

On the road home through the darkened woods the restless hurrying leaves frightened the boy so that, with his weariness from walking against the wind, his hunger from being all day without food, and with the cold nipping his body, he began to cry. The father took the boy in his arms and holding him across his breast like a babe went down the hill to their home. (p. 19)

Beaut's fear of the season can be interpreted as a fear of maturity in contrast to his father's cheerful acceptance of mature life as it is manifested in the season. It is this attitude that Beaut recognizes in the father when he gives his life to his fellow miners.

A variety of other epiphanies involving death also appear in several of the short stories. The story "Brother Death" is yet another reflection of the death imagery from Tar. The two oak trees, "cut one day in the fall," are symbolic of the relationship between Mary and Ted and the doom which is but a matter of time:

They were lusty trees, their roots down in the rich, always damp soil, and one of them had a great limb that came down near the ground, so that Ted and Mary could climb into it and out another limb into its brother tree, and in the Fall, when other trees, at the front and side of the house, had shed their leaves, blood-red leaves still clung to the two oaks. They were like dry blood on gray days, but on the other days, when the sun came out, the trees flamed against distant hills. The leaves clung, whispering and talking when the wind blew, so that

the trees themselves seemed carrying on a conversation.¹³

The death of the trees is Mary's epiphany and brings her to believe that there is more than one kind of death, "there was something, a driving destructive thing in life, in all relationships between people. All of this felt dimly that day--she always believed both by herself and Ted--but only thought out long afterward, after Ted was dead" (p. 188). The impending death of her younger brother is somehow less ominous than the death of feeling in her older brother and her father, who commands that the trees be cut.

Anderson's imaginative sketch of Abraham Lincoln develops around the death of Ann Rutledge which takes place in the fall: "She died. Her death came in the late fall, just as the leaves were dying on the trees."¹⁴ The seasonal leaves are here used as a direct metaphor of death. Lincoln himself is to escape from this metaphor by going

¹³Sherwood Anderson, Death in the Woods and Other Stories (New York: Liveright, Inc., 1933), p. 284. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

¹⁴Sherwood Anderson, "The Hero: Abraham Lincoln: A Lincoln Fragment," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, ed. Paul Rosenfeld (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 548. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition.

to the living roots of the autumn trees:

The sky and the stars were far away, like Ann Rutledge, now. The winds in the trees above came from nowhere and were going nowhere.

There was something to be understood that had had to be understood then and there, by him lying on the ground at the foot of the tree in the darkness--that had to be understood deep down within himself. When it had been grasped, he would be able to go toward the light in the farmhouse, go and let Bowlin Green and his wife give him human comfort--The thing to be understood had to do with something outside himself, with the ground on which he was lying, with the roots of the tree near which he was lying, with the roots that went far down into the ground rather than with its branches that reached up to the stars and were caressed by the vagrant winds that had come from nowhere and that were going nowhere. (p. 600)

After several hours on the ground, Lincoln finds his epiphany which Anderson describes as "the patience of trees" (p. 601).¹⁵ He is finally able to accept the passing of the leaves because he recognizes the dormant life of the tree which, with time, will perpetuate new life.

Tom, in "Chicago Hamlet," is also concerned with the grasping of life. He is obsessed with the ugliness in life, exemplified in the dirty house and the unkempt children of his father's second marriage, but is shown a spot of beauty by the October moon: "The heels and the little balls of flesh below the toes were black with the dirt of the fields but in the centre of each foot there

¹⁵For an antithetical epiphany, also in the fall, see "The Man's Story," Horses and Men, pp. 304-312.

was a place. It was not black but yellowish white in the moonlight."¹⁶ This one tiny clean spot prompts Tom to wash himself in the moonlight and gives him a new hope for life:

You see, I couldn't feel any very definite purpose in life, but there was something. There was a feeling I had as I stood naked in the cold washing my body. Perhaps I just wanted to have that feeling of washing myself again sometime. You know what I mean--I was really cleansing myself, there in the moonlight, that night.

"And so I got back into bed and kept my fingers closed, like this, like a cup. I held my own life in my hand and when I felt like opening my fingers and letting my life slip away I remembered myself washing myself in the moonlight."¹⁷

His cleansing is heavy with allusions to the Last Supper and indicates the cupped hand as an acceptance of life, both ugly and beautiful. The fall moonlight, like the flame of the autumn leaves, somehow touches and illuminates the inner beauty which makes life livable.

The moon, the bright and brittle leaves, the wind, the clouds, and the rain are all the messengers of the autumnal season as it is used by Anderson to awaken a character to the meaning of life. The season sometimes

¹⁶Horses and Men, pp. 154-55.

¹⁷Horses and Men, pp. 154-55.

accompanies lesser awakenings,¹⁸ but it is almost always present, in some form, to attend the greater recognitions of life.¹⁹ Perhaps the most versatile of all the seasons, autumn is also a flexible motif.

¹⁸ Although spring is usually the season of sexual awakening, the autumn accompanies three such epiphanies in "An Ohio Pagan," Horses and Men, pp. 341-47; "The Man Who Became a Woman," Horses and Men, pp. 201-28; and "Not Sixteen," Sherwood Anderson: Short Stories, ed. Maxwell Geismer, American Century Series (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), pp. 282-89.

¹⁹ For contradictory intrusions of the fall season see "Unused," Horses and Men, pp. 88-92, and Windy McPherson's Son, pp. 73-76.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the went bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard . . .

T. S. Eliot, "The Wasteland"

The autumnal motif in Anderson's work is seen in a variety of avatars, but becomes a thematic motif as seen in the autumn leaves. As a recurring metaphor the leaf is repeatedly used to depict man as he is tossed by the winds of life. In the continuous stream of humanity men come and go as the leaves on the trees. So aptly expressed in the epiphany of George Willard, "seeing, as though they marched in procession before him, the countless figures of men who before his time have come out of nothingness into nothingness,¹ the concept is rather bleak and fatalistic. George sees himself in this procession as "merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun" (p. 234). For many Anderson characters epiphany ends here, but for others there is a brighter

¹Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, ed. Malcolm Cowley and John H. Ferres (1919; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 234.

side to the leaf. Although subject to uncertainty and tossed by the wind, the leaf can, at the same time, be beautiful, even glorious.

For Anderson there are two types of leaves, the rustling leaves and the clinging leaves. The rustling leaves are indicative of life, and although they may occasionally be spring and summer leaves, they appear more often and more emphatically as autumn leaves. The clinging leaves, on the other hand, are almost always autumn leaves and represent a denial of life.

As with the leaves there are two major types of characters in Anderson's writings, and they may be classed accordingly as those who are able to live life and those to whom life is denied. The initial difference between the two is the ability to realize the uncertainty of life and yet not be crippled by that realization. This ability to ride with the wind is the mark of the mature Anderson character.

George Willard is one of the more fortunate able to grasp this maturity, and the story of his epiphany, so aptly named "Sophistication," is a sad but dignified recognition of life. George does not recoil in terror at his realization but accepts it, and then reaches out for what life can offer. At this point, the rustling

autumn leaves enter to accompany George on his way.

Likewise, the epiphany of Anderson's Lincoln is a story of acceptance, heavy with images of trees and wind, and Anderson's final portrait of the man is

. . . a man come out of nowhere, going nowhere, a man into whom all things of his day flow freely, out of whom all things of his day flow freely. Such a one does not feel himself as important. Nothing seems important, and still he feels the life about him as important, feels young girls creeping into barns with farmhands on warm spring afternoons, feels wild geese flying northward far up in the sky, trees coming into green, dead leaves of trees scurrying before a wind in the fall, young green shoots of corn coming up out of black ground in new cleared land, feels the desire of birds to sing at the mating time, feels inner laughter as precise shivering old maids hurry along paths toward back-houses on winter afternoons, feels just the impulse of a law partner, a Billy Herndon, when he has got drunk again and has talked too much--feels all there is in the life about, accepts all there is.²

The man sees the insignificance of his own life, yet recognizes the trivia of life as part of a larger scheme.

Such is the recognition which brings the adventurers to a settled acceptance of life and prompts the escapees to seek a situation in which the trivia of life can be accepted without suffocation. These characters, in the midst of life's uncertainty, are able to find a workable solution. They are still subject to the winds, but there

²Sherwood Anderson, "The Hero: Abraham Lincoln: A Lincoln Fragment," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, ed. Paul Rosenfeld (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 601.

is the spark of maturity which makes them almost tragically beautiful. Speaking metaphorically in one of the short stories, Anderson explains the particular charm of these autumn leaves: "In the Spring the leaves on maple trees are lovely, but they are even more lovely in the Fall--a flame of color--manhood and womanhood."³ Although destined for death, there is at least that one flicker of glory. In the Notebook Anderson writes, "The oak trees have retained last year's leaves and these are now a dull red. I see death here as I have seen it so often in the faces of men in the cities, but here the note of beauty has remained in the midst of death. The dull red leaves that rattle in the wind are the visible signs of it."⁴ Here again is the beauty of the autumn leaves which makes itself seen and heard even in death.

Yet, not all autumn leaves are beautiful, and the less fortunate are destined to fall, wet and clinging. Such are the Anderson characters who reach epiphany in the fall rain, and are unable to move with the wind. The drifter from the newspaper story, "Among the Drifters," is most notably characterized by the wet leaves clinging

³Sherwood Anderson, "Return," Death in the Woods and Other Stories (New York: Liveright, Inc., 1933), p. 33.

⁴Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Notebook (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), pp. 42-43.

to his shoes as he sets out to murder his wife. Alice Hindman and Enoch Robinson, also in the fall rain, find a devastating epiphany which denies their claim to a mature and meaningful life. Although the leaves are not physically present in "Adventure," Alice herself is almost a personification of the clinging leaf as she clasps her pillow to her and waits for life to come to her. In "Loneliness" the pasted leaves are a part of the rainy night which brings Enoch out to tell the story of his pitiable existence.

Likewise in "Brothers" the old man, who clasps his dog under his arm and goes about telling of the family he has invented from newspaper stories, is a character unable to face real life and move with the wind:

An hour ago the old man of the house in the forest went past my door and the little dog was not with him. It may be that as we talked in the fog he crushed the life out of his companion. It may be that the dog like the workman's wife and her unborn child is now dead. The leaves of the trees that line the road before my window are falling like rain--the yellow, red and golden leaves fall straight down, heavily. The rain beat them brutally down. They are denied a last golden flash across the sky. In October, leaves should be carried away, out over the plains, in a wind. They should go dancing.⁵

All men should be able to move with life, but not all are so fortunate.

⁵ Sherwood Anderson: Short Stories, ed. Maxwell Geismar, American Century Series (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 40.

In the short story, "Seeds," LeRoy realizes the danger of denying life its uncertainty and trying to hold too tightly that which is meant to flow freely: "It isn't so simple. By being sure of yourself you are in danger of losing all of the romance of life. You miss the whole point. Nothing in life can be settled so definitely. The woman--you see--was like a young tree choked by a climbing vine. The thing that wrapped her about had shut out the light. She was a grotesque as many trees in the forest are grotesques."⁶ His words are but an echo of the old writer's theory in "The Book of the Grotesques," "that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood."⁷ It is from a desire to be cleansed of such falsehoods that LeRoy expresses the desire to be a dead leaf:

"I would like to be a dead dry thing," he muttered looking at the leaves scattered over the grass.
 "I would like to be a leaf blown away by the wind."
 He looked up and his eyes turned to where among the trees we could see the lake in the distance. "I am weary and want to be made clean. I am a man

⁶ Sherwood Anderson, The Triumph of the Egg: A Book of Impressions from American Life in Tales and Poems (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921), pp. 30-31.

⁷ Winesburg, p. 25.

covered by creeping crawling things. I would like to be dead and blown by the wind over limitless waters," he said. "I want more than anything else in the world to be clean." (p. 32)

Here death becomes a simple adjective, nowhere near as frightening as the clinging, crawling imagery of stagnant, wasted life.

Those Anderson characters able to live and die in uncertainty are the fortunate ones, the ones free to enter into the natural flow of humanity and find meaningful relationships. On the other hand, those who demand security are passed by and destined to live and die in loneliness. Both characters are explained in the metaphor of the autumn leaves which dance and sing in the wind or fall clinging to the ground.

The metaphor of the autumn leaves may be stated specifically in the narration of a story, and it is often implicit in the action of the story itself. In many instances the metaphor is personified as the character is moved by the season to a state of agitation and restlessness. The season may appear in many different guises, but its purpose is to effect a reckoning in the life of the character. The result is the Anderson epiphany.

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