

Starting my research project was honestly both exciting and intimidating. As someone who was completely unfamiliar with Hale Library and its digital resources at Kansas State University, I wasn't confident in how to find or evaluate scholarly sources. The assignment required me to locate peer-reviewed literature that would support my argument, and I knew this meant I had to be precise, accurate, and thoughtful in my research. What I didn't realize at the time, however, was how much this process would help me grow, not just as a researcher, but as a writer as well.

I began to feel a lot more confident in my ability to cipher through research and use K-State's databases when I attended a seminar hosted by Kansas State University librarian Sara K. Kearns. Before this seminar, I felt completely lost navigating the K-State library's website. I didn't know what keywords to use, how to find full-text articles, or even which databases to trust. Dr. Kearns's guidance during the seminar was incredibly helpful, and I owe so much to her and many other members of K-State's staff. Dr. Kearns walked us through the entire research process, from logging into the library portal to filtering search results. Her advice was clear and easy to follow, and I left the session feeling much more confident and ready to start my research.

Before this project, I sometimes struggled to make strong, well-supported arguments in my writing. I might have had an interesting idea, but I wasn't always able to back it up with solid evidence. Through this research experience, I saw examples of how professional scholars develop and defend their arguments using data, theory, and references to previous work. Reading scholars' writing helped me model my own and fix the way I approached certain points in the writing process. I started to pay closer attention to how authors introduced their topics, structured their points, and used citations effectively.

Integrating peer-reviewed sources into my writing gave my argument more credibility. I realized that strong writing isn't just about having good ideas, it's also about connecting those ideas to a broader conversation. The research I found on the library's website showed me how

to do that. I found myself revising my paragraphs to make my reasoning clearer and more precise, which made my writing not only stronger but also more purposeful.

This project also improved my ability to evaluate sources critically. With Dr. Kearns's help, I learned how to skim through long articles, scan introductions and conclusions, and quickly decide whether a source was worth reading in full. I developed an eye for spotting weak arguments, unsupported claims, and biased perspectives. Instead of just quoting a source because it supported my point, I began asking whether the source was truly credible and relevant. As a result, my writing became more focused and defensible, and helped me craft a well-supported research paper.

In the early stages of the project, I often felt frustrated. I wasn't sure what I was doing, and I doubted my ability to find the right information and properly tie it into what I was trying to say. But I stuck with the process, and the more I practiced, the more confident I became. Now, I feel much more comfortable conducting academic research and writing papers that are grounded in scholarly evidence. I grew to enjoy using the library's database while reading different perspectives, making connections, and using those insights to sharpen my argument. I also learned that good research takes time and patience. There were moments when I felt stuck or couldn't find the exact source I needed, but I learned to be persistent. Sometimes that meant rephrasing my keywords, checking a different source in the database, or even walking away for a bit and returning with a fresh perspective.

Perhaps most importantly, this experience taught me not to be afraid to ask for help. Before this project, I might have tried to figure everything out on my own, wasting time and growing more frustrated. Attending Sara K. Kearns' seminar reminded me that there are resources and people at K-State who are there to support my learning. Reaching out was one of the best decisions I made during this process. It reminded me that growth doesn't happen in isolation; it often requires guidance and support from others.

Looking ahead, I know I'll continue using the research tools I've learned while navigating the K-State database. I plan to rely on Hale Library and its databases for future assignments, and I'll keep applying the writing techniques I picked up from reading scholarly articles. This project has given me a solid foundation to continue growing as a researcher, and I'm excited to keep building on it.

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English 310

December 4, 2024

Branching Out Of Grief: Ada Limón Navigating Grief Through The Use Of Trees

In her poetry collection, *Bright Dead Things*, Ada Limón features tragic memories and feelings from her childhood and adulthood. Many scholars have noticed a common theme in Limón's collection; the use of intense emotions such as grief and joy to connect herself to the world and her surroundings. Most scholars have further delved into the connection that Limón has with her emotions and nature in her entire collection of poetry. Some scholars think that Limón connects her works through the use of nature being affected by human emotions while others believe Limón uses the environment around herself to work through her grief and find joy. I expect to find a connection between these two arguments to provide a clearer interpretation of how Limón uses strong emotions such as grief and joy to better understand the overlooked details of the trees she encounters and works through periods of adversity in her life.

In what ways does Limón use the metaphor of a tree to relate to and justify the strong emotions inside her? Many poems in *Bright Dead Things* convey feelings of grief and tension through the use of trees. For example, in her poem, "The Tree of Fire," Limón uses a colorful tree to connect with a memory involving her and her lover earlier that morning. The tree is a conflicting image of both destruction and beauty, creating tension for readers between Limón's

grieving thoughts and her ability to still see the allurements of the environment around her. In the poem, Limón describes that the tree outside her window has “lurid red leaves/ that demand a clanging,/ screaming alarm,” (Limón, 15) depicting it not as a vision of death or anger, but as a symbol of change and progression. The fire “consumes” the tree, yet it burns with a brilliance that highlights the coordination of the pain and clarity of grief. This fiery image captures the way Limón wants to portray how sorrow can strip us down to essentials, leaving behind an unexpected clarity. This metaphor also serves as an example of the way Limón conveys the importance of stopping and connecting with nature during rough periods in our lives to better understand how we feel and push through our grief or troubles. Similarly, in her article, “U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón discusses the importance of grief,” Zoe Dorado argues that throughout her entire poetry collection, Limón uses her emotions to connect readers to a moment of understanding between themselves and the mental obstacle they are trying to overcome. Throughout the article, Dorado pulls evidence from previous interviews with Limón regarding her appreciation for nature to work through her grief and find joy in small, but significant things. Dorado also focuses on the way Ada Limón’s writing touches on the change of emotions between times of joy and grief and how Limón stresses the importance of a balance between the two. Limón’s descriptions of the tree in “The Tree of Fire” merge her personal feelings and innermost thoughts with her surroundings, integrating the landscape into her understanding of self and loss. This connection between nature and identity reinforces Limón’s poetic exploration of what it means to be a sensitive human in changing and confusing environments.

Limon also works through her feelings of grief by writing about fleeting moments between her and those she knew. Her poem, “Mowing,” shifts the metaphor of the tree to focus on the ordinary and repetitive moments in life. Here, the act of her neighbor mowing around a tree becomes an intimate moment of reflection for Limón. Limón draws our attention to the tree’s quiet endurance as time goes on, emphasizing how grief, like the change of seasons, flows. The tree is insignificant, yet present, a witness to Limón’s attempts to make sense of her loss. Just as Limón uses the simple tree in her neighbor’s yard to reflect on her thoughts and feelings, The Library of Congress uses its article, “Library of Congress: U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limon to Launch “You Are Here” With Anthology of Nature Poems, Poetry Installations in National Parks,” to argue and expand upon the idea of humans becoming reconciled with nature through their humanistic emotions in Limón’s *You Are Here*. The Library of Congress establishes its point by introducing the poetry collection and diving further into the aspects of nature Limón uses to connect herself to the world around her. The article also focuses on the importance of the way humans respond to the world around them because nature is also deeply affected by our actions during our times of grief and joy as said by Limón. This reveals a close-knit bond between the poet, Limón, and the world around her. Just like the tree metaphor in her collection, *Bright Dead Things*, Limón uses nature to create a sense of self to understand the endeavors she is faced with as her life progresses.

How does Limón’s location and surroundings influence her emotions? Another one of Limon’s poems, “The Saving Tree” brings the metaphor full circle, offering the tree as a site of refuge and recovery for Limón. Limón writes of a tree that “saved her,” framing it as a source of

grounding and consolation. Its “strength” becomes her strength, its rootedness reminds her of the possibility of stability and growth after the turmoil she faces. In this poem, she explains wanting to find comfort in the fallen leaves of a tree, stating that “It (the tree) saves/ by not trying, a leaf like some note/ slipped under the locked blue door. (Limon, 22). She later explains how this made her feel as though the tree instructed her to “stay.” Limón uses this poem to illustrate how trees offer a space where our grief can soften, and joy can quietly take root again and grow. In her article, “Bright Dead Things by Ada Limón,” Lindsay Tigie argues that Limón uses her poetry collection, *Bright Dead Things*, to demonstrate the important connection between intimate tragedy and its relationship to urban environments and the natural world. Throughout their article, Tigie connects various topics that Limón covers in *Bright Dead Things*, such as time and distance, youth and experience, and estrangement and delight. Through the use of these connections, Tigie can build an argument that depicts Limón’s *Bright Dead Things* as more than just connecting with nature, but also about navigating our own emotions in thoughts with connection to the surrounding environment.

Ada Limón’s *Bright Dead Things* is a collection of poetry that examines the interplay of grief and joy, using the recurring metaphor of a tree to navigate the emotional landscape. In her poems, the tree is not just a passive detail but an active participant in the narrative of human emotions. It reflects rootedness while also symbolizing growth, change, and the potential to rise above our sorrows. The tree becomes a metaphor for how grief grounds us in reality while simultaneously pushing us toward transformation. Through poems like “Tree of Fire,” “Mowing,” and “The Saving Tree,” Limón transforms the tree into a complex symbol. Through

these three poems, Limón shows how the tree becomes a vessel for human emotion and how it is a reflection of the human spirit. Limón's poetry collection, *Bright Dead Things*, invites us to see that, like trees, we can adapt and continue to grow, even in the aftermath of our greatest losses. Through her poetry, we see that grief and joy are not opposites but intertwined forces, much like the roots and branches of a tree. Limón shows us how to find time and the effort to grieve deeply, grow slowly, and, ultimately, discover light among the leaves.

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