



Eco-centric Narratives and the Deconstruction of Anthropocentrism in Richard Powers' *The Overstory*



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ABSTRACT

*This paper examines Richard Powers' *The Overstory* through the lens of eco-criticism, focusing on its eco-centric narrative structure and the deliberate deconstruction of anthropocentrism. The novel challenges human-dominated worldviews by presenting trees not as passive background elements but as sentient, interconnected beings with their own form of agency and voice. Powers reshapes narrative conventions by interweaving diverse human characters whose lives are irrevocably altered by their relationships with trees, thereby emphasizing ecological interdependence and the intrinsic value of non-human life. The text destabilizes the traditional hierarchy that places humans above nature, replacing it with a more holistic and egalitarian ecological perspective rooted in deep ecology. By granting narrative authority to trees and forests and foregrounding environmental activism, *The Overstory* advocates for a reimaged ethical framework in which nature is no longer a resource to be exploited but a living community to be respected. Through an eco-critical analysis, this paper explores how Powers' work functions as both a literary and environmental call to action, urging readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world in the face of ecological crisis.*

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The novel *The Overstory* (2018), depicted interdisciplinary approach bridging the gap between science and literature by Richard Powers. The Novel keeps a landmark in contemporary eco-fiction with background in physics and music informs his narrative style, blending scientific precision with poetic prose to explore complex themes such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological consciousness (Clark, 2020, p.113). The

novel reflects Powers' growing concern with humanity's disconnection from the natural world, aligning his work with the goals of environmental literature and deep ecology.

The *Overstory* is structured around nine protagonists whose lives become deeply intertwined with trees, forming a tapestry of human and non-human interconnection. Each character experiences a transformative

moment through their encounter with trees, suggesting that nature can radically reshape human consciousness and ethics. The narrative moves from individual backstories ("Roots") to a collective climax of ecological resistance ("Crown"), illustrating the evolution of environmental awareness. As scholars like Buell (2005, p.141) and Heise (2008, p.56) note, this shift from human-centered to eco-centered storytelling reflects a larger trend in ecological literature what might be termed the "re-centering of the non-human."

Through its innovative structure and thematic depth, *The Overstory* becomes a seminal text for eco-critical analysis. The novel critiques anthropocentrism the belief in human superiority and centrality and instead advances a vision of ecological egalitarianism. Powers presents trees not as passive scenery but as intelligent beings with their own communication systems, memories, and social networks, a concept supported by scientific research such as that of ecologist Suzanne Simard (Simard, 2021, p.198). By humanizing trees and natural ecosystems, Powers challenges the reader to recognize the sentience and value of non-human life, inviting a reevaluation of humanity's ethical obligations toward nature.

As the world grapples with escalating environmental crises, *The Overstory* has emerged as a powerful narrative intervention that bridges fiction and ecological science. It exemplifies what Timothy Morton (2007, p.130) describes as "the ecological thought" a mode of awareness that resists the

separation of human and non-human realms. Scholars such as Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (2014, p.7) have emphasized the role of narrative in shaping ecological imaginaries, and Powers' novel contributes meaningfully to this discourse. Its ability to provoke emotional, ethical, and intellectual responses places it at the forefront of environmental humanities, making it a rich subject for continued eco-critical scholarship.

Critical Responses on Ecocritical Consciousness

Eco-centric narratives, which position the natural world not as mere backdrop but as an active agent in storytelling, have become a critical focus in ecocriticism over the past few decades. These narratives challenge the traditional anthropocentric paradigm that privileges human experience, instead advocating for a decentered approach that recognizes the intrinsic value and agency of non-human life. Lawrence Buell (1995, p.139) laid the foundation for understanding this shift in *The Environmental Imagination*, arguing that truly environmental texts must foreground nature as a presence rather than merely a setting. He emphasizes that eco-centric literature must decenter the human and engage with the more-than-human world as morally and narratively significant.

Following Buell, Ursula Heise (2008, p. 12) expands the conversation in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, proposing that ecological narratives must also engage with global systems and the planetary scale of environmental crises. While eco-centrism traditionally emphasized local, immediate

environments, Heise's work suggests that contemporary eco-fiction must integrate both place-based and global ecological awareness. This dual focus is evident in novels like *The Overstory*, which blend intimate, personal relationships with trees and broad-scale ecological activism.

Timothy Morton's (2007, p.133) *Ecology Without Nature* further complicates eco-centric representation by critiquing the very concept of "nature" as a stable, idealized category. Morton argues that eco-literature should dismantle the false dichotomy between human and non-human realms, advocating instead for an "ecological thought" that recognizes entanglement, co-dependence, and the blurring of boundaries between living systems. This aligns with Richard Powers' narrative strategy in *The Overstory*, where humans and trees are bound together in shared systems of time, trauma, and resilience.

In recent years, the framework of material ecocriticism developed by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (2014, p.3), has redefined eco-centric storytelling by emphasizing the narrative agency of matter itself. In their anthology *Material Ecocriticism*, they explore how landscapes, plants, and ecosystems function as storytelling agents, capable of shaping and being shaped by cultural and literary discourses. This theoretical approach helps illuminate how trees in *The Overstory* are not only characters in the human sense but also bearers of meaning, memory, and resistance.

Moreover, scholars such as Scott Slovic (2010, p.61) and Rob Nixon (2011, p.5) have contributed to understanding the role of eco-narratives in shaping environmental ethics and political consciousness. Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is especially relevant to eco-centric fiction, as it highlights the gradual, often invisible harm inflicted upon ecosystems and marginalized communities harm that novels like *The Overstory* make visible and emotionally resonant.

Together, these scholars establish a robust framework for analyzing eco-centric narratives. They affirm that such narratives are vital not only for reconfiguring the literary imagination but also for cultivating ecological awareness and ethical transformation in the Anthropocene. Building on these theoretical insights, the next section examines how *The Overstory* deconstructs anthropocentrism through its narrative structure.

The Deconstruction of Anthropocentrism

The concept of anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are the most significant entities in the universe has long shaped Western literature and philosophy, often relegating the natural world to a passive or utilitarian backdrop. In literary narratives, this manifests through a human-centered lens that marginalizes non-human life. Anna Grear (2015, p. 230) examines how the concept of "anthropocentrism" the centering of humans as the prime subjects of legal and ethical consideration is deeply embedded in law and environmental discourse. She applies deconstructive critique to this anthropocentrism by

interrogating the underlying structure of the human subject (“Anthropos”) as it appears in both legal systems and the idea of the Anthropocene. Grear argues that to dismantle anthropocentrism, one must challenge not only its explicit assumptions but also the invisible hierarchical and structural presuppositions (e.g., privileging humans over non-humans, equating legal subjectivity with humanity) that underpin it. The goal is an ethical re-structuring that moves beyond human-centered law and acknowledges non-human agency. Eco-criticism, as introduced by scholars like Lawrence Buell (1995, p.7), offers a critical tool for challenging these assumptions. Buell argues that an environmentally-oriented work must give “the nonhuman environment a presence not merely as a framing device but as an actor in the drama.” This eco-critical approach calls for a shift in focus from anthropocentric storytelling to eco-centric narratives that recognize the agency and intrinsic value of the more-than-human world.

To further dismantle anthropocentric paradigms, recent theoretical developments such as posthumanism and deep ecology offer vital frameworks. Arne Naess’s deep ecology philosophy asserts that all living beings possess intrinsic worth, regardless of their utility to humans, and promotes a relational ontology where humans are part of, not above, the biosphere (Naess, 1973, p.95). Posthumanist thinkers like Donna Haraway (2003, p.5) and Rosi Braidotti (2013, p.46) extend this critique by questioning the human/non-human binary

itself, proposing that subjectivity and agency are shared across species and systems. These frameworks emphasize entanglement, mutual dependency, and the rejection of hierarchical thinking ideas that align closely with the narrative and ethical undercurrents of *The Overstory*, where trees and ecosystems are treated as intelligent, communicative, and ethically significant.

In addition, material ecocriticism, as advanced by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (2014, p.7), provides a powerful lens for understanding the non-human as an active narrative force. This theory contends that matter be it soil, tree, or river has the capacity to “storify,” to hold and convey meaning through interaction with human and non-human agents. In *The Overstory*, Richard Powers employs this idea by portraying trees not only as biological entities but also as storytellers that influence human consciousness, ethics, and identity. By merging scientific insight with poetic imagination, Powers participates in the broader theoretical project of decentering the human and constructing a narrative ethics rooted in ecological interconnection. In *The Overstory*, Richard Powers intricately weaves together human and non-human narratives to challenge the anthropocentric worldview that dominates both literature and society. Through multiple interconnected storylines centered around trees and ecological consciousness, Powers dismantles the traditional human-centered narrative structure and instead proposes a worldview in which humans are merely one part of a

vast, interdependent system. This literary strategy aligns with the theoretical project of deconstructing anthropocentrism, which questions the primacy of human subjectivity and instead emphasizes relationality, multispecies agency, and ecological ethics. By merging scientific insight with poetic imagination, Powers participates in the broader theoretical project of decentering the human and constructing a narrative ethics rooted in ecological interconnection.

Decentering the Human: An Eco-critical and Deconstructive analysis of The Overstory

In the novel, *The Overstory*, Richard Powers begins his decentering of the human subject by grounding the narrative not in anthropocentric experience but in arboreal time, agency, and legacy. This section introduces characters through their formative encounters with trees, framing trees not as background scenery but as active agents in shaping human identity and consciousness. From Nicholas Hoel's family chestnut tree, which outlives generations of caretakers, to Mimi Ma's father's reverence for a mulberry tree symbolizing cultural memory, Powers subtly dismantles the notion of human superiority by foregrounding non-human endurance, intelligence, and resilience. Through an eco-critical lens, "Roots" disrupts the human-centered narrative by privileging ecological continuity over individual progress, thereby inviting readers to rethink their temporal and ethical relationship with the natural world. Drawing upon deconstructive theory, particularly Derrida's challenge

to hierarchical binaries, Powers unravels the binary between nature and culture by blurring boundaries between human lives and arboreal cycles. Trees are not passive but narratively and symbolically central; they "storify" human lives and carry memory, as theorized by Iovino and Oppermann's material ecocriticism. This narrative strategy aligns with Timothy Morton's "ecological thought," which insists on the entanglement of all life forms and critiques the illusion of human separateness. In "Roots," then, Powers performs a quiet but profound reorientation of literary attention from the human to the more-than-human establishing the philosophical foundation for the novel's later eco-political resistance, and initiating a sustained critique of anthropocentrism through a story deeply rooted literally and figuratively in the lives of trees.

In the opening of *Roots*, an unnamed woman says: First there was nothing. Then there was everything. Then, in a park above a western city after dusk, the air is raining messages. A woman sits on the ground, leaning against a pine. Its bark presses hard against her back, as hard as life. Its needles scent the air and a force hum in the heart of the wood. (Powers, 2018, p. 7)

The illustrated lines are dorm the beginning part of the novel' *The Overstory* exemplifies ecocritical themes by positioning nature as central, alive, and communicative. Beginning with a sweeping cosmic perspective "First there was nothing. Then there was everything." Powers situates human existence within the vast timeline of the

universe, emphasizing an ecocentric rather than anthropocentric worldview. The scene shifts to a quiet park where “the air is raining messages,” suggesting that nature is actively sending signals, possibly referencing the biochemical and ecological communication among trees. The woman leaning against the pine experiences the tree not as a backdrop but as a presence the bark presses against her “as hard as life,” and its needles and inner force create a sensory and almost spiritual resonance. This intimate, respectful depiction of the tree underscores the ecocritical idea that the natural world is not inert or subordinate but vibrant, meaningful, and intertwined with human life. This early scene not only personifies trees but places them within a communicative network, decentering humanity by demonstrating a prehuman intelligence that demands ethical consideration. The novel begins by asserting that non-humans possess their own agency and meaning a foundational move in dismantling speciescentric narrative modes.

Later in *Trunk*, Dr. Patricia Westerford describes an ancient Douglasfir that “before it dies...will send its storehouse of chemicals back down...in a ‘last will and testament’” (Powers, 2018, p. 219). Here, Powers literalizes tree agency, using legal metaphors to elevate the tree’s actions to moral and communal significance. By attributing intention and altruism to the tree, the text defies anthropocentric assumptions that only humans enact moral agency or historical narrative. Power asserts in the text as:

THE FARM SURVIVES the chaos of God’s will. Two years after Appomattox, between tilling, plowing, planting, rouging, weeding, and harvesting, Jørgen finishes the new house. Crops come in and are carried off. Hoel sons’ step into the traces alongside their ox-like father. (Powers, 2018, p.14)

These lines reflect the dynamic interaction between human labor, the land, and broader natural and historical forces. The phrase “The farm survives the chaos of God’s will” suggests a tension between human attempts to cultivate and control the land and the unpredictable power of nature (or divine providence, often interpreted as natural fate). The survival of the farm amid historical upheaval “Two years after Appomattox” grounds human activity within a larger temporal and ecological context, highlighting the endurance of the land across generations.

The detailed listing of agricultural tasks “tilling, plowing, planting, rouging, weeding, and harvesting” emphasizes the intimate, daily labor required to sustain a relationship with the land. This rhythm of work represents a kind of ecological stewardship, reinforcing an ecocritical view that values sustainable, place-based interaction with the earth. The intergenerational labor, with sons joining their “ox-like father,” evokes the embodied, physical bond between people and soil, while the daughters’ dispersal suggests the spread of human-nature relations into the surrounding landscape.

This novel portrays the farm not just as a site of survival and tradition, but as a node

where human history, family, and the natural world intersect, evolve, and, eventually, diverge. Powers writes: "Humans carry around legacy behaviors...trapped in the bodies of sly, socialclimbing opportunists shaped to survive the savanna" (Powers, 2018, p.67). This selfcritique unpacks anthropocentric blind spots, suggesting humanity's perceived supremacy is a product of ancestral adaptations rather than moral or evolutionary advancement. The irony of humans mistaking their evolutionary quirks for centrality undercuts the novel's broader ecocritical project. Powers assert in the novel:

The artist, born scrupulous, adds the cat. Then the horned toad Emmett keeps in the basement, where the climate is better for reptiles. Then the snails under the flowerpot and the moth hatched from a cocoon spun by another creature altogether. Then helicopter seeds from Adam's maple and the strange rock from the alley that might be a meteorite even if Leigh calls it a cinder. (Powers, 2018, p.45)

This passage from *The Overstory* can be read as a subtle deconstruction of anthropocentrism by illustrating how an artist, though initially driven by human-centered perception, gradually includes a wide array of non-human elements that resist simple categorization or control. The list begins with familiar and domesticated life the cat then moves to more elusive or marginal forms: a horned toad, snails, a moth, seeds, a rock. As the artist's page fills, the boundaries between human and non-human blur. The inclusion of creatures from hidden or overlooked spaces the

basement, under a flowerpot, or a back alley challenges hierarchical thinking that places humans and their immediate companions at the top of a value system. The phrase "things, living or nearly so" further disrupts clear distinctions, suggesting a spectrum of life that cannot be fully grasped through anthropocentric frameworks.

Moreover, the passage critiques human attempts to define and fix meaning onto the natural world. The rock, possibly a meteorite or just a cinder, exposes the instability of human knowledge and labels what it "is" shifts depending on who observes it. The act of filling the "newsprint page" can be seen as an effort to contain or represent nature, yet it ultimately hits a limit, implying that the non-human world exceeds human comprehension and representational systems. By expanding the artist's focus beyond the anthropocentric to include overlooked, misunderstood, or ambiguous elements of nature, Powers suggests that human perspectives are inadequate to fully engage with the complexity and agency of the non-human world. The passage ultimately invites a humbler, more inclusive ecological awareness that moves beyond the human-centered gaze.

Powers constructs an eco-centric narrative by shifting the focus away from human authority and toward the complex, decentralized intelligence of a non-human species—ants. Adam observes the colony not as a superior being imposing order. He says:

Adam studies his living map. After a while, the time-lapse flow of color-coded ants begins

to suggest how signals might get passed along without any central signaler calling the shots...When the Popsicle is gone, he puts bits of his lunch in different spots and measures how long it takes for those bits, too, to disappear. (Powers, 2018, p.61)

The character named Adam is depicted as the natural entity here, a curious participant trying to understand a system that operates by its own logic. The ants are described in terms of their autonomous, adaptive behaviors: signals pass “without any central signaler,” indicating a form of distributed intelligence that challenges the human-centric notion of hierarchical control. This mirrors eco-centric perspectives, which emphasize the agency, resilience, and organization of natural systems without positioning humans at the top of a command structure. Adam’s careful experimentation moving food, building barriers serves more to reveal the intricacy of the ants’ collective behavior than to reinforce human dominance.

The description culminates in a striking comparison: the ant colony is “as cunning at getting what they need as anything human.” This directly deconstructs anthropocentrism by refusing to view intelligence, agency, or adaptability as uniquely human traits. Instead of using humans as the standard against which all other life is measured, the narrative grants ants equivalent cunning and purpose, dismantling the binary between “rational humans” and “instinct-driven nature.” By presenting animal behavior as intricate and meaningful in its own right, Powers invites the reader to reconsider the traditional

human-nature divide and adopt a perspective where non-human life is complex, adaptive, and worthy of equal narrative attention. This shift undermines human exceptionalism and reorients the narrative gaze toward a more balanced, ecological vision of life.

During the courtroom scene toward the end of *Trunk*, Patricia argues that “rot adds value to a forest...streams in old growth have five to ten times more fish...people could make more money harvesting mushrooms and fish...and other edibles...year after year” (Powers, 2018, p.122). In the quoted passage from the novel, Patricia’s argument reflects a profound eco-centric perspective that challenges traditional anthropocentric views of nature as a resource to be exploited for short-term gain. By emphasizing that “rot adds value to a forest,” she highlights the ecological importance of natural decay processes, which are often overlooked or dismissed in human-centric approaches to land use. The presence of rot fallen trees, decomposing vegetation, and rich organic matter nurtures a complex web of life, from fungi to fish, illustrating that what appears useless or dead from a human economic viewpoint is, in fact, essential to sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem health. Her claim that “streams in old growth have five to ten times more fish” reinforces the idea that intact, mature ecosystems provide a far richer, more sustainable foundation for life than managed or exploited ones. By advocating for alternative forms of economic value harvesting mushrooms, fish, and other renewable forest goods Patricia deconstructs the anthropocentric logic

that prioritizes immediate extraction (like logging) over long-term ecological balance. This narrative shift from domination to coexistence aligns with eco-centric ethics, which recognize intrinsic value in nonhuman life and interdependence within ecosystems. Ultimately, Patricia's voice in the novel serves as a critique of exploitative land practices and a call to realign human economies with nature's regenerative rhythms. This appeal to ecological rationality, framed economically, challenges anthropocentric market logic. It presents a sustainable, interspecies ethic based on forest health and biodiversity rather than immediate human profit.

In *Crown*, the activists' direct-action falters, and Nature reclaims creative authority. Following Olivia's death, Nick's Forest art installation is "swallowed" by moss, beetles, and lichen "the mosses surge over...turning the mosses to soil" (Powers, 2018, p.474). In *Crown*, the dissolution of the activists' efforts and the eventual reclamation of Nick's Forest art installation by natural forces symbolizes a profound ecological truth: nature operates on its own temporal and creative logic, independent of human intention. The imagery of moss, beetles, and lichen overtaking the installation following Olivia's death signifies the limits of human agency in the face of ecological processes that are patient, persistent, and regenerative. From an ecocritical perspective, this moment illustrates the concept of deep time and the humility required in ecological thinking it deconstructs the anthropocentric notion that humans are the sole creators of meaning or

art. Instead, nature emerges as the ultimate artist and restorer, erasing the traces of human ambition and grief with its quiet but powerful forces. The line "turning the mosses to soil" encapsulates the cyclical nature of life and decay, emphasizing that true sustainability and renewal come not from human intervention but from the intrinsic capacities of the earth. Thus, this scene reinforces the eco-centric view that human narratives are ultimately subsumed within broader, nonhuman systems of transformation. This moment dramatizes nature's primacy; human interventions are temporary, unscripted by non-human forces. The artwork's dissolution reaffirms that forests are autonomous agents in their own right. Nick hears voices. One voice, really. It repeats what it has been saying to him for decades now, ever since the speaker died (Powers, 2018, p.465). This line reflects a powerful ecological vision that challenges anthropocentric assumptions by centering the presence and agency of nonhuman life. The snapping branch and the vivid listing of elusive animals' mink, lynx, bear, caribou, wolverines emphasize a world teeming with life that exists independently of human observation or control.

The fact that many of these creatures "never let people glimpse them" subtly deconstructs the anthropocentric belief that nature exists for human use or comprehension; instead, it asserts that much of the natural world operates beyond human perception. The birds "giving themselves as gifts" suggests a voluntary offering from nature, not something that can be claimed or owned, reinforcing

an eco-centric ethic of respect and humility. The presence of scat, tracks, and “evidence of things unseen” further evokes a world rich with meaning and activity that humans only partially perceive, reminding us that human narratives are but one thread in a larger, often hidden ecological tapestry. Nick hearing “one voice” from a deceased figure adds a spiritual and psychological layer, blurring the boundary between human memory and the living landscape. In an eco-critical and deconstructive anthropocentric reading, this moment dismantles the hierarchy that places human life and consciousness at the center, instead affirming a deep interconnection with and reverence for the more-than-human world a world that speaks, remembers, and endures in ways beyond human grasp. The closing imagery collapses the boundary between human sensorium and forest aliveness. Nature is not a silent stage but a choir of unspoken intelligences, one that ultimately carries the narrative forward.

Powers emphasizes on the natural existence he says:

At that thought, the vessels in his brain give way, the way that earth does when roots no longer hold it together... To the mysterious outside. There, two life sentences pass in a few heartbeats. The seedlings race upward toward the sun. (Powers, 2018, p.470)

These lines powerfully illustrate ecocritical and deconstructive anthropocentric themes by depicting the collapse of the boundary between human consciousness and the natural world. The metaphor comparing the

vessels in the protagonist's brain to soil losing its cohesion without roots highlights the deep interconnection between the human body and the Earth, suggesting that both are subject to similar organic laws of growth, decay, and rupture. As his brain “gives way,” there’s a symbolic surrender of the rational, controlling self-central to anthropocentrism allowing for a revelatory moment in which human time and nature’s time converge. The rapid growth of seedlings and the cyclical rise and fall of tree trunks compress years of ecological life into mere heartbeats, challenging the human tendency to measure the world by our own temporal and spatial frameworks. Nature is no longer a static backdrop or resource; it becomes a dynamic, reclaiming force its branches aggressively enclosing the house and breaking through its windows, symbolic of nature's resistance to human containment. The house, often a symbol of civilization and human dominance over the environment, is overtaken and pierced by natural growth, deconstructing the anthropocentric illusion of separation and superiority. This moment reveals that human life is not outside or above nature but deeply embedded within its cycles subject to, and ultimately inseparable from, the power and agency of the nonhuman world.

Finally, Powers revisits the theme of time and perspective. In Seeds, he reminds us that “people drift back through the park... making a living” a fraught phrase in the context of trees that endure centuries beyond human timescales (Powers, 2018, p.472). And Douglas reflects, “Here’s the thing

about trees...they will hold him high above the ground and let him look out over the arc of the Earth" (Powers, 2018, p.464). This extraction captures a key tension between human temporality and ecological time, central to ecocriticism and the deconstruction of anthropocentric perspectives. The phrase "people drift back through the park...making a living" becomes deeply ironic when set against the backdrop of ancient trees whose lifespans stretch far beyond human memory or economic cycles. From an ecocritical standpoint, this contrast exposes the narrowness of human-centered values particularly capitalism and productivity when measured against the vast, patient rhythms of the natural world. The trees do not "make a living" in the human sense; they live, endure, and shape ecosystems across centuries, offering an alternative, more expansive conception of value and existence. Douglas's reflection that trees "will hold him high above the ground and let him look out over the arc of the Earth" metaphorically elevates the human perspective, not through domination or technology, but through alignment with nature. In doing so, it dismantles the anthropocentric hierarchy that places humans above all, suggesting instead that insight and understanding come from humility and symbiosis.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, *The Overstory*, Richard Powers weaves a profound eco-centric narrative that systematically deconstructs anthropocentrism, urging readers to reconsider humanity's place within the vast, intricate web of life. Through moments such as Patricia's advocacy for the unseen value of rot, Nick's art being reclaimed by moss and insects, the presence of unseen animals and enduring trees, and the overwhelming force of nature breaking through human structures, Powers challenges the illusion of human dominance and permanence. He juxtaposes fleeting human ambitions against the deep time of forests, revealing how ecosystems operate beyond human comprehension or control. The novel repeatedly shifts perspective away from human-centered concerns such as productivity, legacy, and visibility and instead uplifts the quiet agency, resilience, and intelligence of the nonhuman world. In doing so, Powers not only critiques exploitative environmental practices but also offers a vision of humility, in which meaning arises from recognizing interdependence with the living Earth. Ultimately, *The Overstory* stands as both a literary and ecological call to consciousness, inviting readers to listen to the world beyond themselves and to imagine a future shaped not by mastery, but by kinship and reverence for all forms of life.

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