

Ecocritical Study: Dwelling Aspect Portrayed in Richard Powers the Overstory

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the human-nature relationship and its environmental impact in Richard Powers's The Overstory through Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework, with a particular focus on the concept of Dwelling. Garrard's theory distinguishes between Georgic, which represents a damaging interaction with nature, and Ecological Indian, which embodies a nurturing approach. This research examines how the novel portrays these contrasting relationships, illustrating how the characters' connections with nature either contribute to environmental harm or foster preservation. By analyzing the novel through Garrard's theoretical lens, the study reveals how Powers's characters confront and mitigate the adverse effects of individuals and corporations on the environment, showcasing the intricate dynamics of human-nature interactions in the context of environmental stewardship. The analysis highlights how the novel's narrative strategies and character arcs emphasize the critical role of empathy and ecological consciousness in addressing environmental challenges. Furthermore, it underscores the potential for literature to inspire real-world environmental action by reflecting on the complexities of human engagement with the natural world. Through this exploration, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how literary works can shape and influence environmental attitudes and behaviors..

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Human-Nature, Dwelling, Georgic, Ecological Indian.

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism has grown to become a very crucial discipline dealing with the very intricate relationships connecting literature, culture, and the environment. In essence, ecocriticism is concerned with how human narratives reflect and shape our interaction with nature, which comes out in literary texts (Diaper, 2022; Fawareh et al., 2023; Lanta et al., 2022). There is one figure in this very discourse, however, who personifies the texts that are open to implications far beyond textual analysis per se and onto larger socio-ecological fronts: Greg Garrard. This Introduction explicates how Garrard has conceptualized 'dwelling' in ecocriticism and how this finds an echo in the Richard Powers novel The Overstory, where through 'dwelling', literature offers impetus to ecological awareness and ethical reflection in contemporary society.

Ecocriticism was rising in the wave of environmental movements in the 1960s and 1970s and had just started taking real form as a scholarly discipline studying the ecological dimensions of literature. Probably most significantly to date is Greg Garrard's Ecocriticism (2004), which provided a comprehensive account of the formation of this field from early nature writing to its status as an interdisciplinary approach. Garrard argues that literature has an important role in structuring environmental discourse as a cultural mirror to respond to societal attitudes towards nature and environmental issues.

Central to Garrard's ecocritical framework is the notion of dwelling. According to him, to dwell means much more than physical habitation. To a great extent, psychological, cultural, and ethical factors shape our sense of attachment, cultural narratives, and ethical duties toward environments (Beery et al., 2023). With Garrard's holistic approach, one realizes that literature does not treat human thinking regarding nature just as a representation but also contributes to it, compelling one to rethink his or her relationship with the natural world in ethical terms.

Garrard goes on to explore dwelling as a practice that deepens literary representations of the human-nature relationship. This means that dwelling connects the people to the environment psychologically, in emotional and spiritual connections, as represented by the characters in the literary plot navigating their ecological

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identities. The cultural implication of dwelling is that it is an assessment of how cultural myths and the stories around us then mold our perception of nature and, accordingly, ways in which these will shape our communal attitude towards sustainable ecology. Ethically, it would have us consider our responsibilities to the Earth as good housekeepers, which advocates for ecological ethics recognizing intrinsic values of non-human entities.

Garrard's concept of dwelling in contemporary literature is found amply in Richard Powers' novel *The Overstory* (2018). The novel interlaces a wide variety of human and non-human narratives, showing deeply the bond which exists—all showing deeply the bond that exists—between trees and the lives of human beings. Built around a complex story line and detailed ecological imagery, Powers pushes readers to widen their perception and relationship with nature, urging we recognize agency and intelligence in the natural world.

The characters of Powers usher in emblematic representatives of different forms of dwelling—like the lonely activist who dwells in a tree, the scientist studying forest ecosystems, and so much more. The array of ecological consciousnesses held by these characters representing an inherently multifaceted understanding of dwelling that Garrard discusses. The calls to build upon that place from which the psychological and cultural dimensions of relationships between people and nature begin to kick into play in *Overstory* bring demands for ethical reflection on our collective responsibility toward conservation.

The intersection of Garrard's ecocritical framework with *The Overstory* underlines the potential literature holds in raising ecological awareness especially in Dwelling aspect and fomenting environmental activism. In identifying and applying this lens of dwelling that Garrard created, ecocritics are able to unpack deeper levels of meaning buried within literary representations of nature as found in Powers' narrative. His novel offers a much-needed reminder of the interrelation between life forms and mobilizes stewardship in view of global ecological challenges.

In the end, whether Greg Garrard successfully contributes to ecocriticism in a corresponding order to develop a firm grasp of the ways literature reflects and shapes one's environments is his notion of dwelling as multidimensional and complex. It resonates profoundly with Richard Powers' quest in *The Overstory*, which proves how important literature can be in setting off an ecological consciousness and ethical reflection. Such a deeper understanding could, therefore, be achieved by interpreting Garrard in relation to key contemporary works of literature for their assumptions about the role that literature can play in fomenting environmental sustainability and social justice in the contemporary world.

Literature Background

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is simply defined as a connection between literature and environment as stated by Glotfley (1996: xix) that Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Basically, ecocriticism itself is a form of green literature talked about nature on which human beings are always in writing and express their mind or ideas that are poured into literary works and always be in contact with the nature (Khan et al., 2024; Akhmar et al., 2022). The literary critique actually established in 1970 was the study of nature writing in a WLA (Western literature Association), conference. Since then, green literature developed to be ecocriticism, moving forward with the help developed science to this very day. Ecological knowledge is not only for seeing the harmony and stability of the environment but to know attitude and human behavior. An ecocritical analysis is, hence, interdisciplinary, penetrating disciplines such as other sciences, literature, culture, philosophy, sociology, psychology, environmental history, political and economic, and religious studies (Garrard, 2004, p. 14; Rahman, 2019).

Garrard views in ecocriticism is in a broader landscape since nature according to him is not only talk about tree but more than that. Garrard (2004, p. ii) stated that Ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production, from Wordsworth and Thoreau to Disney and BBC nature documentaries. It is inspired by, but also critical of, modern environmental movements. Greg Garrard's accessible volume traces the development of the movement and explores the concepts that have most occupied ecocritics, including: Pollution, Wilderness,

Apocalypse, Dwelling, Animals, The Earth. Featuring a glossary of terms and suggestions for further reading, this is an invaluable introduction to one of the most exciting recent developments in literary and cultural studies.

Ecocriticism opens the way to participate in term of preserve the environment through literary works. If it talked about literary work genre nature is not a common thing because most of the prominent literature authors such as William Shakespear, Jane Austin, Edgar Allan Poe they do not write about nature specifically (Khasanah et al., 2024; Nahdhiyah et al., 2023). Ecocriticism emerged to speak about nature through since it less discuss among the literature authors yet nature is crucial in human life so Ecocriticism through literature try to convey a message of how human should treat the nature (Arisa & Rahmi, 2024; Dalyan et al., 2024). Nature is an entity which human cannot live without it since nature support to sustain human life so it is important to learn how to live with nature side by side. As have been mention above some major topics in ecocriticism is dwelling this particular topic will deeply discuss in this article.

Dwelling

Ecocriticism in Garrad (2004) has some major topics like Pollution, Wilderness, Apocalypse, Dwelling, Animals, The Earth. Dwelling is when we built of the sense of belong to a certain as stated by Maltzhan (1996, p. 116) that Dwelling implies the presence of place, and as the architect Norberg -Schulz has shown, place consists in orientation and identification. Both ordered space and built form make it possible for us to know where we are and to gain a sense of belonging to a place. In this article, the author specifically uses Dwelling as the main topic to analyse literary work of Richard Power's the Overstory. Dwelling itself consists four subpoint; Georgic, Modern Georgic, Ecological Indian, and the Trouble with Animism yet only Georgic and Ecological Indian will be used to analyse the work's of Power's the Overstory.

Georgic is a perspective which human being has power over nature in other words all creatures in nature can be used to sustain human life. Human being are able to exploit the source of nature as they like even though during the process of exploitation harms the environment. Georgic point of view is "damaging" towards nature and it the opposite to ecological Indian. Lynn White Jr. in Garrad (2004, p. 108-109) argues that Genesis 1:26, 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth', constitutes a scriptural licence for whatever exploitation we think fit within the framework of moral laws set out elsewhere.

Ecological Indian perspective is "nurturing" towards nature since human and nature are equal. Nature has to be preserved by human being in return human is able to use nature to sustain human life. Garrad (2004, p. 120) stated that The Georgic model of dwelling is of diminishing relevance for most North Americans and Europeans. 'We' apparently cannot dwell in working harmony with nature, but perhaps other cultures are able to do so. Since the sixteenth century at least, 'primitive' people have been represented as dwelling in harmony with nature, sustaining one of the most widespread and seductive myths of the non-European 'other'. The assumption of indigenous environmental virtue is a foundational belief for deep ecologists and many ecocritics. Bylooking Dwelling models both Georgic and ecological Indian are contradictory each other and these two terms will be used to analyse the novel of Richard Powers's *the Overstory*.

Research Method and Sources of Data

This study mainly focused on environmental issue as portrayed in Richard Powers's The Overstory. Qualitative approach is applied in this study in order to produce a narrative or textual description towards phenomena in the novel of Richard Powers. Hancock et al., (2001, p. 6) stated that Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. Therefore, in this study the data is collected from the text of the novel then the researcher interprets text which related to the topic.

Since the novel of Richard Powers entitled the Overstory depicted nature and environment issue, ecocriticism theory especially dwelling aspect by Garrad (2004) is being used by the researcher to find out and presented how the environmental issue occurred within the novel. The researcher read the novel as the primary data comprehensively then nota-taking the text related to the topic. Furthermore, selected the data that connected with the main theme of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ecocriticism has some major topics like Pollution, Wilderness, Apocalypse, Dwelling, Animals, The Earth. In this study the researcher only focused on Dwelling topic to analyse the novel of Richard Powers's *The Overstory*. Dwelling topic is talked about human-nature relationship and in the relationship exist georgic and ecological Indian. Human-nature relationship in georgic perspective is called "damaging" since georgic gives human being to exploit the nature without considering the bad impact on environment. Human beings allow to use the source of nature impulsively as long as it gives them profit. Contradictory, ecological Indian perspective is "nurturing" which human and nature are able to live side by side harmoniously. Human in ecological Indian knows that nature sustain human life so that human should know how to treat nature properly and the impact of environment issue can be reduced.

In this novel, Richard Powers try to convey the message of the important to preserve the nature through each characters. In *The Overstory* each characters are the main character and have special bonding to nature especially tree. These characters Nicholas Hoel, Mimi Ma, Adam Appich, Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly, Douglas Pavlicek, Neelay Mehta, Patricia Westerford, and Olivia Vandergriff try to protect and preserve the environment with their own way toward individual or company intention to exploit nature. The characters meet each other then join a group called "life defence force" committed to preserve redwood.

Georgic

As has been mention above that Georgic is a perspective in dwelling of Garrad's ecocriticism about human who exploits nature and end up harming the environment. Human in georgic perspective see the nature as a commodity so human claims nature inferiority. Some of evidences will be shown below;

Data 1

Death races across Connecticut and Massachusetts, jumping dozens of miles a year. Trees succumb by the hundreds of thousands. A country watches dumbstruck as New England's priceless chestnuts melt away. The tree of the tanning industry, of railroad ties, train cars, telegraph poles, fuel, fences, houses, barns, fine desks, tables, pianos, crates, paper pulp, and endless free shade and food—the most harvested tree in the country—is vanishing. (Powers, 2018, p. 14)

The first data shows that how human is not able to look after the tree (chestnut) after all profit it give to people in Massachusetts. The evidence of how plague kills the tree and cannot maintain tree's health. Indeed, some them put some efforts to remove the plague but the main reason human do that because it gives them bad impact economically not for the tree's sake. Furthermore, the quotation from data 1 is shown that tree is used for tanning industry, train cars, fuel, and etc. from this text the researcher can conclude that tree is being exploit for human profit.

Data 2

Pennsylvania tries to cut a buffer hundreds of miles wide across the state. In Virginia, on the northern edge of the country's richest chestnut forests, people call for a religious revival to purge the sin behind the plague. America's perfect tree, backbone of entire rural economies, the limber, durable redwood of the East with three dozen industrial uses—every fourth tree of a forest stretching two hundred million acres from Maine down to the Gulf—is doomed. (Powers, 2018, p. 15)

On this passage shows that after the tree has disease and no longer useful to human, the tree is being cut by the people of Pennsylvania for hundreds wide across the state. Beside, the amount of the tree that being destroyed is tremendously huge which the amount approximately two hundred million acres. The tree can be saved if only human treat the tree not only as a commodity that give them profit but also beyond that since tree is genuinely important to sustain human life in the future.

Data 3

Now the gods are dying, all of them. The full force of human ingenuity can't stop the disaster breaking over the continent. The blight runs along ridgelines, killing off peak after peak. A person perched on an overlook above the southern mountains can watch the trunks change to gray-white skeletons in a rippling wave. Loggers race through a dozen states to cut down whatever the fungus hasn't reached. The nascent Forest Service encourages them. Use the wood, at least, before it's ruined. And in that salvage mission, men kill any tree that might contain the secret of resistance. (Powers, 2018, p. 16)

On this passage, another phenomena is shown as the tree keep being destroyed by the blight which the researcher it can be happened because the human ignorant when it comes to preserve the nature. The environment is supposed to be nurture by human being's sake in long term way but what happened here is

the opposite since despite being contagious from the blight instead of find the solution to cure the disease, loggers race through a dozens state to cut down the tree. This evidence from the passage emphasize that awful circumstance for the tree being dreadfully treated by people.

Data 4

A five-year-old in Tennessee who sees the first orange spots appear in her magic woods will have nothing left to show her own children except pictures. They'll never see the ripe, full habit of the tree, never know the sight and sound and smell of their mother's childhood. Millions of dead stumps sprout suckers that struggle on, year after year, before dying of an infection that, preserved in these stubborn shoots, will never disappear. By 1940, the fungus takes everything, all the way out to the farthest stands in southern Illinois. Four billion trees in the native range vanish into myth. Aside from a few secret pockets of resistance, the only chestnuts left are those that pioneers took far away, to states beyond the reach of the drifting spores. (Powers, 2018, p. 16)

The passage from data 4 shows the aftermath of human ignorant in treating nature as one of significantly important in human life. The passage explicitly displays the consequence of tree is no longer exist and what left is only a picture for future generation. The greedy of human being can cause such a horrible impact as four billion trees in the native range vanish into myth. The children will never be able to experience and see a beautiful creature of nature like their mother childhood and what for them is a dreadful environment.

Data 5

Extinction sneaks up on the Hoel farm—on all the family farms in western Iowa. The tractors grow too monstrous, the railroad cars full of nitrogen fertilizer too expensive, the competition too large and efficient, the margins too marginal, and the soil too worn by repeated row-cropping to make a profit. Each year, another neighbor is swallowed up into the massive, managed, relentlessly productive monocrop factories. Like humans everywhere in the face of catastrophe, Frank Hoel Jr. goes blinking into his fate. He takes on debt. He sells off acreage and rights. He signs deals with the seed companies he shouldn't. Next year, he's sure—next year, something will come along and save them, as it always has. (Powers, 2018, p. 18)

On this passage describes Hoel family's farm in danger for being extinct in western Iowa. People are only focused on making profit with tractors monstrous and railroad cars full nitrogen fertilizer with expensive price. As the price go high, farmer cannot afford them and the consequence is the plant being destroyed just like extinction farm of Hoel's family. This is the condition of individual and company when they do not pay attention to nurture the plant but instead of only making profit.

Data 6

The oaks swear him in as temporary deputy in their fight against the human monster. Good Macduff hides behind their cut branches (Many living things were harmed in the making of this production), hoping he'll remember his next lines, praying he'll defeat the usurper again tonight, and marveling at the strange, irregular, lobed shapes fleshing out his camouflage like the letters of an alphabet from outer space, each glyph shaped by something that looks for all the world like deliberation. He can't read the text on his banner. It's written by a thing with five hundred million root tips. It says, Oak and door come from the same ancient word. (Powers, 2018, p. 71)

The passage form data 6 mentioned about Ray and Dorothy play a theatre about Macduff, lady Macbath and trees. The oak as a tree fight against the human monster to protect them from being destroyed. The moral story from theatre both Ray and Dorthy play is preserved the tree from greedy human as describe from the passage of tree's struggle from human horrible action.

Data 7

He stumbles back through the curtain of concealing trees, crosses the road, and peers through the woods on the other side. More moonscape stretches down the mountainside. He starts up the truck and drives. The route looks like forest, mile after emerald mile. But Douggie sees through the illusion now. He's driving through the thinnest artery of pretend life, a scrim hiding a bomb crater as big as a sovereign state. The forest is pure prop, a piece of clever artistry. The trees are like a few dozen movie extras hired to fill a tight shot and pretend to be New York. He stops at a gas station to tank up. He asks the cashier, "Have they been clear-cutting, up the valley?" The man takes Douggie's silver dollars. "Shit, yeah." "And hiding it behind a little voter's curtain?" "They're called beauty strips. Vista corridors." "But . . . isn't that all national forest?" The cashier just stares, like maybe there's some trick to the question's sheer stupidity. "I thought national forest was protected land." The cashier blows a raspberry big as a pineapple. "You're thinking national parks. National forest's job is to get the cut out, cheap. To whoever's buying." (Powers, 2018, p. 91)

On this passage of data 7 mention explicitly the destruction of forest conducted by corporation and ignorant individual. The trees in the forest is wiped out and nothing left. Douggie or Douglas Pavlicek is so furious experiencing such a horrible consequence of human greedy. Even the national forest that should be protected is not safe from corporation and ignorant individual as Douggie confirm it to one of the cashier who live

nearby about why the cut down national forest and the cashier answer is because the price of the lumber is cheap. Indeed, as a person who devoted to nature, Douggie seems cannot believe his eye and what happened in front of his eye is totally unacceptable.

Ecological Indian

Ecological Indian is one of model of dwelling in ecocriticism by Garrad and ecological Indian perspective is the opposite of georgic. Ecological Indian believe that as human being, it is their duty to preserve the nature for a better environment to sustain human life. Furthermore, ecological Indian believe that human and nature can live side by side to support each other. The researcher proved some evidences of ecological Indian depicted in the novel of the Overstory by Richard Powers below;

Data 8

That May, Hoel discovers six chestnuts stuffed in the pocket of the smock he wore on the day he proposed to his wife. He presses them into the earth of western Iowa, on the treeless prairie around the cabin. The farm is hundreds of miles from the chestnut's native range, a thousand from the chestnut feasts of Prospect Hill. Each month, those green forests of the East grow harder for Hoel to remember. But this is America, where men and trees take the most surprising outings. Hoel plants, waters, and thinks: One day, my children will shake the trunks and eat for free. (Powers, 2018, p. 9)

On this passage, Hoel with his six chestnuts plant it to treeless field in Iowa, it is a behaviour of human in ecological Indian perspective who wanted to live side by side with nature. Hoel wants grow a plant since he feel the longing of green forest and he afraid he no longer remember the green forest. Hoel wanted one day his children can eat from what his plant for free. Hoel behaviour towards tree is not harmful for the tree because he does not see the tree as a commodity where human can exploit it as they wish.

Data 9

THEIR FIRSTBORN DIES in infancy, killed by a thing that doesn't yet have a name. There are no microbes, yet. God is the lone taker of children, snatching even placeholder souls from one world to the other, according to obscure timetables. One of the six chestnuts fails to sprout. But Jorgen Hoel keeps the surviving seedlings alive. Life is a battle between the Maker and His creation. Hoel grows expert at the fight. Keeping his trees going is trivial, compared to the other wars he must wage each day. At the end of the first season, his fields are full and the best of his seedlings stands over two feet tall. In four more years, the Hoels have three children and the hint of a chestnut grove. The sprigs come up spindly, their brown stems lined with lenticels. The lush, scalloped, saw-toothed, spiny leaves dwarf the twigs they bud from. Aside from these starts and a few scattered bur oaks in the bottomlands, the homestead is an island in a grassy sea. (Powers, 2018, p. 9)

On this passage, despite the problem Hoel's facing regarding the tree seedlings that do not sprout, he does not give up and keeps the rest seedlings alive. After four years, Hoel's struggle has the green light when there is a of chestnut already grow over two feet tall. In term of ecological Indian perspective, Hoel's nurtures the tree decently and expected for the tree to grow healthy for future generation so that human and nature will be able to live side by side harmoniously. The distinction between georgic and ecological Indian when it comes to plant a tree is the intention which georgic plant tree for profit while ecological Indian do it for future generation.

Data 10

The farm descends upon his first two sons. The elder, Carl, wants to write off the sunk costs of the photo ritual. Frank, the younger, needs to redeem his father's decade of obscure research by carrying it forward as stubbornly as the tree spreads its crown. More than a hundred frames along, the oldest, shortest, slowest, most ambitious silent movie ever shot in Iowa begins to reveal the tree's goal. A flip through the shots shows the subject stretching and patting about for something in the sky. A mate, perhaps. More light. Chestnut vindication. When America at last joins the world conflagration, Frank Hoel is sent to France with the Second Cavalry Regiment. He makes his nine-year-old son Frank Jr. promise to keep taking pictures until his return. It's a year for long promises. What the boy lacks in imagination he makes up for in obedience. (Powers, 2018, p. 15)

On this passage, Hoel's family clearly apply ecological Indian within his family as shown on the passage where Hoel's family across generation alternately take the responsibility nurturing the tree and take a picture of it every year. What Hoel's family does to the tree becomes ritual meaning that the family have to conduct this ritual since it becomes the so called annual sacred. Hoel's family prove that live side by side with nature and indirectly the Hoel's family ritual can save the environment.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the significant influence of the human-nature relationship on the environment as

portrayed in Richard Powers's *The Overstory*. By employing Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework, particularly the concept of Dwelling, the research reveals the dual perspectives of Georgic and Ecological Indian, which illustrate how human interactions with nature can be either damaging or nurturing. The analysis of Powers's novel highlights the intricate connections between the characters and the natural world, emphasizing the importance of ecological consciousness and ethical reflection in contemporary society. The characters' efforts to protect and preserve the environment against individual and corporate exploitation underscore the potential of literature to inspire real-world environmental activism. Through the detailed examination of *The Overstory*, this study reinforces the idea that literature plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding and attitudes towards nature, urging us to rethink our responsibilities towards the environment for a sustainable future. Ultimately, this research not only enhances our comprehension of Powers's literary work but also contributes to the broader discourse on environmental ethics and sustainability. It calls for a more profound engagement with literature as a means to foster a deeper ecological awareness and responsibility.

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