



Hacettepe University Graduate School Of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

**HEALING IN NATURE: ECOPSYCHOLOGY IN  
RICHARD POWERS' *THE OVERSTORY* (2018) AND  
*BEWILDERMENT* (2021)**

Elifsu SAÇBÜKEN

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2024



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## ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The jury finds that Elifsu Saçbükten has on the date of 04/06/2024 successfully passed the defense examination and approves her master's thesis titled "Healing in Nature: Ecopsychology in Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) and *Bewilderment* (2021)".

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## ETİK BEYAN

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## ABSTRACT

SACBÜKEN, Elifsu. *Healing in Nature: Ecopsychology in Richard Powers' The Overstory (2018) and Bewilderment (2021)*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2024.

Richard Powers' novels, *The Overstory* (2018) and *Bewilderment* (2021), explore the psychological impacts of ecological degradation and restoration. *The Overstory* interweaves the lives of nine different characters brought together by their deep connection to trees and their collective efforts to combat deforestation. *Bewilderment* follows the journey of a father and his young son as they navigate the complexities of grief and environmental degradation, finding solace and understanding in their relationship with the natural world. Both novels emphasize the symbiotic connection between humans and nature, highlighting the restorative power of natural engagement and the detrimental effects of environmental loss. This thesis situates itself at the intersection of ecopsychology and biophilia, aiming to examine how Powers' portrayal of nature-human interactions reflects broader concerns about environmental crises and mental health. By integrating perspectives from ecopsychology, it hopes to illuminate the innate human affinity for the natural world and the psychological ramifications of its devastation. Furthermore, by analyzing the biophilic tendencies of Powers' characters and their psychological evolution within ecologically degraded landscapes, this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on the imperative for environmental stewardship and mental health awareness.

### Keywords

Ecopsychology, biophilia, ecocriticism, environmental literature, ecological restoration.



## ÖZET

SACBÜKEN, *Elifsu. Doğada İyileşmek: Richard Powers'ın The Overstory (2018) ve Bewilderment (2021) Romanlarında Ekopsikoloji*, Master Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Richard Powers'ın romanları *The Overstory* (2018) ve *Bewilderment* (2021), ekolojik tahribat ve restorasyonun psikolojik etkilerini incelemektedir. *The Overstory*, ağaçlarla bağlar kuran ve orman tahribatına karşı birlikte mücadele eden dokuz farklı karakterin hayatlarını sunmaktadır. *Bewilderment* ise bir baba ve oğlunun, çevresel yıkımın zorluklarıyla başa çıkarken, doğayla ilişkilerinde teselli ve anlam bulma çabalarını anlatmaktadır. Her iki roman da insanlarla doğa arasındaki simbiyotik ilişkinin üzerinde durarak, doğayla etkileşimin iyileştirici gücünü ve çevresel kayıpların zarar verici etkilerini vurgular. Bu tez, ekopsikoloji ve biyofili kavramlarını bir araya getirerek, Powers'ın doğa-insan etkileşimlerini nasıl yansıttığını ve bunun çevresel krizler ile ruh sağlığı konusundaki endişeleri nasıl ele aldığını incelemektedir. Ek olarak, bu tez ekopsikolojinin farklı perspektiflerini ortaya koyarak, insanın doğayla olan içgüdüsel yakınlığını ve doğanın tahribatının psikolojik sonuçlarını aydınlatmayı hedeflemektedir. Ayrıca, Powers'ın karakterlerinin biyofilik eğilimlerini ve ekolojik olarak tahrip olmuş çevrelerde yaşadıkları psikolojik zorlukları analiz ederek, çevre koruma ve ruh sağlığı farkındalığının önemine dair tartışmalara katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

### Anahtar Sözcükler

Ekopsikoloji, biyofili, ekokritik, çevre edebiyatı, ekolojik restorasyon.

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## INTRODUCTION

Richard Powers' novels, *The Overstory* (2018) and *Bewilderment* (2021), explore the link between environmental destruction and human well-being. Through various characters, Powers examines the effects of environmental loss on mental health, highlighting both the healing power of nature and the detrimental impacts of its destruction on human psychology. Using biophilia and ecopsychology, this thesis dissects how Powers' portrayal of nature-human interaction reflects broader concerns about environmental crisis and mental health. The study aims to illuminate the innate human affinity for the natural world and the psychological ramifications of its devastation. By employing content analysis and thematic exploration, it delves into how the characters' interactions with nature influence their psychological transformations. Focusing on character development, symbolism, and narrative portrayal of environmental engagement, this thesis explores the symbiotic relationship between human mental health and ecological well-being. In doing so, it seeks to reframe the understanding of the human-nature relationship, advocating for coexistence that fosters both ecological preservation and human well-being. This analysis will investigate how the characters' attitudes toward nature evolve and how these changes affect their psychological well-being. Ultimately, this thesis intends to contribute to a broader understanding of the impact of environmental issues on human mental health by examining the psychological repercussions of environmental degradation on the characters in Powers' novels.

Biophilia, a combination of two Greek words for "life" (bio) and "love" (philia), means love for life (Barbiero and Berto 1). Both German psychologist Erich Fromm and American biologist Edward O. Wilson separately coined the biophilia concept, which has a critical place in environmental criticism and literature. Giuseppe Barbiero, in "Affective Ecology as Development of Biophilia Hypothesis," explains the difference between Fromm's and Wilson's definition of biophilia as follows: "Fromm uses the term biophilia to describe the psychological orientation to be attracted to all that is alive and vital. Wilson uses the term biophilia to describe the evolutionarily adaptive trait of being attracted to what is alive and vital" (Barbiero 6). In other words, while Fromm

regarded the connection as a natural tendency, Wilson saw it as an adaptive quality that evolved to improve human survival. Thus, Wilson contends that the relationship is intrinsic and has existed from the beginning of evolution, resulting in a predisposition with the implications for human conduct. Despite the distinct perspectives put forth by Fromm and Wilson regarding the biophilia hypothesis, their respective claims resemble each other. To illustrate, “Fromm and Wilson agree that biophilia has a biological basis and that it is a fundamental human force for developing harmonious relationships between humanity and the biosphere” (Barbiero and Berto 3). In the subject of environmental studies, especially in ecopsychology, Edward O. Wilson’s definition and explanation of the term are more commonly recognized and referenced (Sampson 24). In this thesis, the concept of Wilson’s biophilia will be utilized due to its association with ecopsychology.

In his book *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species* (1984), E.O. Wilson defines biophilia as “[t]he innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (1). He explains the reason for this innate attachment as the fact that humans have evolved depending on the natural conditions around them from the moment they began to form on Earth. Since this connection is rooted in people’s biology, evolution, and development, it leads to a variety of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to natural environments (Simaika and Samways 905). According to Joye and De Block, these associations are the result of thousands of years of human evolution in the environment where constant interaction with and dependency on living organisms and biological processes are essential for human survival and reproduction (190). Furthermore, the inclination of individuals towards nature is genetically transmitted to future generations, as Roger S. Ulrich elaborates on Wilson’s biophilia hypothesis which states that humans possess a tendency to pay attention to, affiliate with, or respond positively to nature, and also highlights the partially genetic basis for humans’ positive responsiveness to nature (73-74). Hence, long-term coevolutionary interactions and evolutionary adaptations have created an internal connection between the human mind and nature, leading to a psychological impact on human well-being through exposure or lack thereof to natural environments.

Giuseppe Barbiero and Rita Berto discuss the concept of empathy as a mediator of affiliation with nature. They explain, “Empathy, which can be a mediator of affiliation with Nature is ‘an emotional state triggered by another’s emotional state or situation, in which one feels what the other feels or would normally be expected to feel in his situation’” (Hoffman, 2008, as cited in Barbiero and Berto 3). Barbiero and Berto note that this emotional response is not limited to human interactions: “Forms of differentiated emotional participation and affective empathy are widespread in mammals” (3). They further elaborate that domestic nature provides numerous opportunities for empathic contact, which can help reduce stress, as suggested by the Stress Recovery Theory (SRT). According to Barbiero and Berto, “It is therefore reasonable to assume that more frequent contact with domestic Nature tends to aid a faster recovery from stress” (3). They support this claim with empirical evidence, noting that relationships with pets significantly contribute to stress recovery: “Humans like to establish emotional relationships with their pets, because this type of affiliation reduces the stress response” (3). Thus, the biophilia hypothesis highlights the psychological benefits of nature, with identification playing a role in enhancing human well-being and reducing stress.

In their article, “Flourishing in Nature: A Review of the Benefits of Connection and Its Application As Wellbeing Intervention,” Capaldi propose that biophilia is one of three main concepts arguing that connection to nature enhances psychological well-being. They explain the biophilia hypothesis as follows: “The biophilia hypothesis posits that our ancestors’ wellbeing and survival depended on connecting with nature. Humans have begun living in urban environments only recently; therefore, the need to connect with nature likely remains an innate part of who we are” (2). The idea resonates with the observation that, after the industrial revolution, increased urbanization and mechanization have led to greater isolation from nature. This detachment may contribute to the prevalence of various mental health disorders, including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and depression (Gullone 311). Biophilia aligns with ecopsychology, suggesting that interaction with nature offers both physical and psychological benefits. People's affection for nature not only fulfills them but also motivates them to protect it. Villegas supports this in her exploration of nature

connectedness, stating that “connecting with nature can lead to a sense of communion with the natural world” (3).

Andy Fisher, in his book *Radical Ecopsychology* (2012) outlines the evolution of ecopsychology as a discipline seeking either to supplement or redefine mainstream psychology’s boundaries (46). According to Andy Fisher, Searles argued that ignoring this significance jeopardizes our psychological well-being, likening the subject matter to “a vast continent, as yet largely unexplored and uncharted” (3). Searles observed,

During the past approximately sixty years, the focus of psychiatry’s attention has gradually become enlarged, from an early preoccupation with intrapsychic [interior] processes . . . to include interpersonal and broad sociological-anthropological factors. It would seem then that a natural next phase would consist in our broadening our focus still further, to include man’s [sic] relationship with his nonhuman environment. (3)

Fisher notes that four decades later, this expansion in psychology’s focus, often referred to as “ecopsychology,” is finally beginning to take shape (3). Scientists like James Lovelock have challenged these notions with theories like the Gaia hypothesis suggesting an interconnection between living organisms and their inorganic surroundings on Earth, constituting a self-regulating, life-sustaining system (11). The anthropocentric perspective on environmental issues has limited its integration into human psychology as stated by Fisher, “From the point of view of ecopsychology, psychology’s ignoring of the nonhuman environment is a staggering oversight, one which persists to this day” (22). As a response, psychologists leaning towards ecocentric views have developed their theories within the framework of ecopsychology. Figures such as Roszak advocate for an ecocentric approach to psychological study proposing that understanding human psychology should incorporate a biophilic perspective. Roszak posits the essence of ecopsychological theory as follows:

In its search for a theoretical foundation, ecopsychology need not go so far. Gaia, taken simply as a dramatic image of ecological interdependence, might be seen as the evolutionary heritage that binds all living things genetically and behaviorally to the biosphere. Just that much is enough to reverse the scientific worldview and all psychology based upon it. (14)

Robert Greenway pioneered the term “psycho-ecology” in 1963, marking the inception of what is now known as ecopsychology. The discipline gained attention with Theodore

Roszak's publication of *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* in 1992, where he officially introduced ecopsychology. In his article "Where Psyche Meets Gaia," Roszak describes ecopsychology as a convergence of ecological and psychological studies. He argues that the field aims to present "[a]n examination of the emotional bonds that exist between humans and the natural world" (Boston 1). The evolution of ecopsychology has also been shaped by contributions from various authors who explore nature's themes, highlighting the interrelation among soil, water, forests, air, and human existence. Fisher provides a comprehensive definition of the theoretical foundations of ecopsychology, with particular emphasis on the significance of Aldo Leopold's land ethics from an eco psychological perspective by saying:

[T]hat the basic concept of ecology is that 'land is a community,' of which humans ought to be considered as 'plain members.' 'We abuse the land,' he said, 'because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.' In this vein, ecopsychologists argue that if we accept the ecological view that we are members of the biotic community, rather than its mere exploiters, then we may learn to recognize the natural world as a social and psychological field, just as we do the human community. (5)

Roszak introduces foundational principles of ecopsychology, aiming to redefine and expand the understanding of the human psyche in relation to the Earth since "The core of the mind is the ecological unconscious" (320). The first principle navigates through the depths of the ecological unconscious, explores the evolutionary narrative of life and consciousness, and proposes a radical reimagining of the ecological identity and responsibilities (320). The concept of the "ecological unconscious," as explored by Theodore Roszak, points to an intrinsic link between the human psyche and the natural world, suggesting that societal and environmental issues are intertwined with humanity's disconnection from this primal awareness. Roszak states,

The contents of the ecological unconscious represent, in some degree, at some level of mentality, the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to distant initial conditions in the history of time. Contemporary studies in the ordered complexity of nature tell us that life and mind emerge from this evolutionary tale as culminating natural systems within the unfolding sequence of physical, biological, mental and cultural systems we know as 'the universe.' Ecopsychology draws upon these findings of the new cosmology, striving to make them real to experience. (320)

Roszak's assertion, "repression of the ecological unconscious is the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society" (320), coupled with Kerr and Key's exploration

of facilitated wilderness experiences in “The Ecology of the Unconscious” illustrates how reconnecting with nature can lead to both personal and ecological healing. They argue that the physical material of wild places occupies the same reality as the unconscious mind, emphasizing the therapeutic potential of such environments (1). This is not only personal healing but extends to ecological healing, motivating individuals to adopt more sustainable lifestyles as “When we feel healed as part of nature, the motivation to live in more ecologically sustainable ways emerges spontaneously” (Kerr and Key 2). The linkage suggests that the path to restoring ecological balance and addressing societal dysfunction lies in healing the split between the conscious lives and the ecological unconscious. Expanding upon this, Roszak delves into the evolutionary side, asserting that the “[c]ontents of the ecological unconscious represent the living record of cosmic evolution” (320), which intertwines the human psyche with the broader evolutionary side of the universe, underscoring human’s intrinsic link to the physical, biological, and cultural systems that comprise the world. In this regard, it can be interpreted that ecopsychology tries to show how humans are connected to the universe, challenging the traditional views that separate people from nature.

The goal of ecopsychology is to heal the alienation between individuals and the natural world. Roszak emphasizes the importance of awakening “[t]he inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious” (320). The principle aims to fix the disconnect between humans and nature, creating a sense of unity and interdependence. It encourages adults to regain a child-like wonder for the world as claimed “Ecopsychology seeks to recover the child’s innately animistic quality of experience in functionally ‘sane’ adults” (320). Roszak’s assertion that “open access to the ecological unconscious is the path to sanity” (320) speaks to the transformative potential of ecopsychology. It suggests that by rekindling human bond with nature, people can address the root causes of personal and societal distress. The principle of healing the alienation between individuals and the natural world is central to ecopsychology and parallels the objectives of traditional psychotherapies. However, whereas conventional therapies primarily focus on resolving conflicts within personal, familial, and societal relationships, ecopsychology extends the therapeutic ambition to include the relationship between humans and the environment. Roszak highlights the



role of awakening “the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious” as a means to repair the fundamental breach (320). The process involves recognizing and nurturing a mutual, sustaining relationship with the natural world, one that acknowledges human dependence on and responsibility to the ecosystems that support life.

Traditionally, prevailing value systems have fostered a disconnect between humans and their natural surroundings (Roszak 320). Ecopsychology, however, challenges and reshapes these perceptions, advocating for a “new cosmology” that integrates humanity within the natural world. Psychological alienation from nature causes individuals to feel disconnected and fosters unsustainable practices and disrespect for the planet’s well-being since “Ecopsychology tells us that the healing of the self and the healing of the planet go together” (Anthony 263). Ecopsychology promotes the integration of scientific understanding of the natural world with personal and collective human experience, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the human-nature relationship and the potential for healing and restoration.<sup>1</sup> It provides a framework for understanding the human-nature relationship as explained by Bucci who argues that by embracing a conscious knowledge of our interdependence and moving away from the insistence upon the centrality and separateness of the individual human ego, people may redirect the current ecocidal course and refashion a holistic and life-affirming paradigm regarding the future of all life on the planet (6).

The following principle which Roszak discusses is about the ecological ego. The survival of life and the species would not have been achieved without this self-adjusting knowledge (305). To gain this knowledge, he argues that the traditional Western view of the self as separate and dominant over nature must be replaced with a more holistic and interdependent understanding of the self as a part of the natural world. To clarify, Roszak’s emphasis on “maturing towards a sense of ethical responsibility with the

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<sup>1</sup> O’Connor discusses the concept of global consciousness, emphasizing that both clients and therapists share equal responsibility for the planet’s condition and are equally affected by it. He comments on his colleagues for their lack of awareness regarding the unhealthy relationship humans have with the planet, which ultimately undermines their work. O’Connor calls for greater awareness and active participation in environmental solutions ( “Therapy for a Dying Planet” 154-55).

planet” (321) underlines the evolution from an anthropocentric worldview to a more inclusive, ecocentric perspective. As individuals cultivate an ecological ego, they become agents of change, influencing their communities, institutions, and governments to adopt more sustainable practices. Moreover, the ecological ego seeks to weave a sense of responsibility into the fabric of social relations and political decisions, suggesting a holistic approach to governance and community living. This involves creating laws, policies, and social norms that protect and restore the environment, ensuring that ecological considerations are at the forefront of public decision-making. The “ecological ego” matures as individuals recognize that their well-being is intricately linked to the health of the environment. The recognition fosters a sense of responsibility not just for one’s own life but for the well-being of the planet as a whole. It challenges the traditional boundaries of ego and identity, suggesting that a truly mature individual sees themselves as a part of the natural world, with duties that extend beyond human-centered concerns.

Additionally, he believes that ecopsychology should focus on understanding and resolving traditionally “masculine” tendencies, such as the desire to control and dominate nature as stated, “In this regard, ecopsychology draws significantly on some of the insights of ecofeminism with a view to demystifying the sexual stereotypes” (321).<sup>2</sup> In its social orientation, ecopsychology adopts a “postindustrial not anti-industrial” perspective (321). Although “[i]t is thus of significant concern that urbanisation and the challenges of modern life are leading to reduced engagement with the natural environment” (Shanahan and Astell-Burt 2), the field does not entirely dismiss the technological progress and industrial capabilities developed by humanity (321). Instead, ecopsychology adopts a “postindustrial” stance over an “anti-industrial” one, aiming to transcend the industrial culture. The goal is to foster a sustainable and balanced coexistence with the natural environment without completely abandoning technological progress. Roszak posits, “Ecopsychology deeply questions the essential

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<sup>2</sup> Roszak asserts that these characteristics play a key part in current environmental challenges by driving people to exploit and degrade the natural world. His assessment is aligned with ecofeminism because it also shows the dominant societal values and attitudes that lead to the exploitation and degradation of nature, since ecofeminism uses critical theory to encourage respect and preservation of nature by emphasizing the continuity between humans and nature, rather than viewing them as separate entities. (“A Theoretical Foundation for Ecopsychology” 18-19).

sanity of our gargantuan urban-industrial culture” (321), challenging the unchecked expansion of industrial activities that harm the planet. However, rather than outright rejecting the technological innovations that have shaped modern society, ecopsychology seeks a harmonious integration of these advancements within a framework that respects the Earth’s ecological limits as claimed “[i]t does so without necessarily rejecting the technological genius of our species or some life-enhancing measure of the industrial power we have assembled. Ecopsychology is postindustrial not anti-industrial in its social orientation” (321).

As a final principle, Roszak asserts that the primary goal of ecopsychology is to comprehend the relationship between personal health and the health of the planet because he claims that the two are interrelated and have a “synergistic interplay” (321). According to Roszak, individual well-being overlaps with environmental well-being and the “rights of the person” are also “rights of the planet” (321). Hence, addressing individuals’ needs and rights is equally essential to protecting and preserving the environment. Lertzman concludes that the principles articulated by Roszak are relevant and worthy of consideration because she describes ecopsychology as a “critical intervention” in traditional psychology, underlining its focus on the emotional and affective responses to environmental degradation. According to Lertzman, ecopsychology offers an insightful “reading” of humanity’s detrimental impact on nature through a “pathological” lens (397). It seeks to delve into the dynamics of human interactions with the environment and aims at reestablishing a harmonious relationship with the natural world.

In this regard, ecopsychology and biophilia theory together illuminate the intricate and reciprocal relationship between human well-being and the natural environment. Brown highlights the complementarity of ecopsychology and biophilia, proposing that their integration forms a holistic approach that supports both human well-being and the preservation of natural habitats (14). As humans and nature have a longstanding relationship, the impacts of natural phenomena on humans become inevitable and vice versa. Theodore Roszak articulates this connection by asserting, “At its core, the human psyche maintains a strong connection to the planet that gave birth to humanity” (3). He also argues, “I think the biophilia hypothesis suggests that there is a level of the human

mind or spirit that is linked almost genetically to the natural world” (“Nature as Healer”). His statement suggests that biophilia is not merely a preference but a fundamental aspect of human psychology, essential for mental health and well-being as claimed:

[b]iophilia has at least begun to generate the sort of behavioral research that passes muster in the academic world as scientific proof. In a sense, ecopsychology might be seen as a commitment by psychologists and therapists to the hope that the biophilia hypothesis will prove true and so become an integral part of what we take mental health to be. (4)

Ecopsychologists like Ralph Metzner believe that the isolation of humans from nature is at the basis of many psychological and societal issues because “The ecologically disastrous consequences of this dissociative split in Western human’s identity become clear when we reflect upon the fact if we feel mentally and spiritually separate from our own nature, body, instincts, sensations and so on” (66). People have evolved by adapting to natural conditions around them, establishing a physiological and psychological connection to the natural environment, as Barbiero claims “The biological evolution of humanity took place in the wilderness.” (8).

The assertions of Roszak and Wilson have been substantiated by scientific research, demonstrating a direct link between environmental degradation and adverse impacts on the human psyche. This highlights the urgency of integrating biophilic principles into human lives and societies to heal both the planet and the human mind. A study by *The Economist* discusses the potentially disastrous effects of a 3°C rise in global temperature levels by 2100 (“This Is What 3°C of Global Warming Looks Like”). The change in weather conditions will cause more destructive storms and hurricanes, leading to more physical and psychological havoc (Ebi et al. 306). According to the American Psychiatric Association’s study, “Climate Change and Mental Health Connection,” “The mental health consequences of events linked to a changing global climate include mild stress and distress, high-risk coping behavior such as increased alcohol use and, occasionally, mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress” (1). Another study conducted by the American Psychiatric Association, “How Extreme Weather Events Affect Mental Health,” illustrates, “Climate change and related disasters cause anxiety-related responses as well as chronic

and severe mental health disorders. Flooding and prolonged droughts have been associated with elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders” (1). Moreover, extreme weather conditions encourage violent behavior in people, resulting in domestic violence (1).

Another environmental disaster that jeopardizes mental health is deforestation which is one of the leading contributors to climate change. Deforestation involves the clearing of forests for purposes like agriculture, urban development, and logging, leading to numerous environmental consequences (Tejaswi 5). A substantial proportion of the global population experiences mental health disorders as presented by Bolton, Montag and Gallo:

Deforestation rates are indirectly driven by poverty, prompted by the increased land requirement needed for farming and livestock grazing. Conversely, poverty is also associated with poorer mental health where those with lower socioeconomic status are at a higher risk for mental health disorders. Urbanization increases the rate of deforestation due to city expansion into forestry area and the use of timber for infrastructure; countries with higher rates of deforestation were found at increased risk of poor sanitation, which conversely has been shown to cause psychosocial distress. Poor food security is found to be strongly associated with poor mental health, on a country level and increased levels of deforestation in low- and middle-income countries affects the ability to grow food. (2)

However, scholarly literature has indicated that engaging in activities in natural settings can potentially result in favorable outcomes for mental well-being. To clarify “Visits to forests improve both physical and mental health whereas an abundance of vegetation and bird wildlife reduces levels of stress, anxiety and depression” (Bolton et al. 2). With urbanization, the rate of deforestation has been on the rise. Biodiversity loss resulting from the ongoing climate crisis and deforestation has detrimental environmental effects. In “Biodiversity and Mental Health,” Hector Duarte Tagles and Alvaro J. Idrovo elaborate on an experiment conducted in 2011 by Gotelli-Colwell, which aimed to understand the relationship between biodiversity and mental well-being. The authors conclude:

Psychological well-being was measured by the administration of a questionnaire to 312 peasants about green space usage for cognitive restoration, positive emotional bonds, and a sense of identity. The study found that there exists a direct positive association between psychological well-being and the extension of green space. (212)

Building on the scientific evidence and statistics that illustrate how deforestation, biodiversity loss, and global warming affect mental health, the integration of ecopsychology and biophilia theories further emphasizes the urgency of conservation and sustainable practices. Such a holistic understanding, which now spans various disciplines including ecology, sociology, anthropology, counseling, and architecture, stresses the global imperative to nurture human connection with nature (Ahmadi et al. 49). In his theoretical article, named “Ecopsychology and The Person-Centered Approach: Exploring the Relationship,” Lewis Blair has analyzed the concept of self in person-centered therapy. It is argued that an ecologically-oriented concept of self may be necessary to shift the perspective toward the biosphere and future generations. By critiquing the person-centered concept of self, the author highlights the importance of eco-centric psychology in promoting a more holistic and sustainable approach to human relationship with the environment (Blair 54). Blair’s critique of the person-centered concept of self and the proposal for an ecologically-oriented self emphasize the necessity for literature and psychology to adopt frameworks that regard the human-nature relationship as integral rather than separate.

Roszak’s criticism of mainstream psychology in explaining his theory of ecopsychology is that it is human-centered. The term “human-centric psychology” is often used to describe the traditional, Western approach to psychology, which places “[t]raditional therapeutic goals such as individual happiness, and autonomy; its general anthropocentrism” (Tudor 316). According to Roszak human-centric psychology is responsible for fostering an anthropocentric worldview in which human beings are seen as separate from and superior to the natural world (326). The anthropocentric perspective prevalent in psychology has played a role in precipitating the ecological crisis, which promotes a culture that exploits and dominates the natural world. Nick Hayes, in his book *Psychology in Perspective* (2002), argues that this attitude has roots in Western philosophical traditions. He notes, “[t]heories on the nature of knowledge and the relationship between individuals and the world were fundamentally based on the premise of human superiority and separation from nature” (130). His analysis emphasizes how deeply rooted the ideas of human superiority and control over nature are in human thinking, and it highlights the need for a shift towards more eco-centric

models of thought and practice. Connecting the role of biophilia and ecopsychology in literature to the discussions by Lewis Blair, Roszak, and Nick Hayes presents a shift from anthropocentrism to a more eco-centric perspective.

Literature, as a reflection and exploration of human experience, becomes a tool for challenging the anthropocentric worldview and promoting a deeper, intrinsic connection to the environment. Hayes's analysis of Western philosophical thought contributing to an exploitative culture towards the natural world further emphasizes the need for a paradigm shift. By integrating ecopsychology and biophilia into literature, there is an opportunity to question and move beyond these deeply ingrained notions, fostering a culture that values ecological cycle and sustainability. The influence of human-centered psychology extends into the realm of literary analysis and interpretation. Critics may employ psychological theories to delve into the intricacies of characters' motivations, utilizing concepts like unconscious drives to shed light on human behavior. Psychoanalysis serves as an example of this approach. Barry characterizes psychoanalytic criticism as "a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature" (96). This method involves analyzing characters' motivations, subconscious desires, and internal conflicts to gain deeper insights into the text. Despite its contributions, this focus on human-oriented perspectives has faced criticism for promoting a somewhat narrow and individualistic viewpoint. Ecocritics, including Cheryll Glotfelty, have voiced concerns over the anthropocentric slant in literary discourse. Glotfelty points out:

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. (16)

To commence with an examination of biophilia's role in literature, Joseph Carroll, in his work *The Ecology of Victorian Fiction*, ventures beyond a simple ecological analysis of Victorian literature. He explores the integration of biophilia into environmental literary criticism, highlighting its significance in understanding literature's engagement with nature. Carroll observes that the inclination towards and gratification derived from engaging with nature are present in the works of renowned

nature writers like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Edward Abbey. These authors have managed to isolate, concentrate, and refine this innate human sentiment towards nature. Carroll elaborates, “The desire to come into close contact with the natural world, and the satisfaction that that contact gives, make themselves most apparent in nature writers—in Thoreau and Muir, Leopold and Abbey” (301). He further asserts that this affinity for nature, although particularly pronounced in nature writing, is a widespread phenomenon that permeates the human experience. This sentiment, according to Carroll, “is part of the universal human experience, and it is a universal aspect of literary representation” (302), suggesting that the essence of biophilia is not only foundational to the genre of nature writing but also constitutes a vital element of literary representation at large. In this regard, biophilia theory can be used as a literary framework to analyze the human-nature relationship by highlighting a critical examination of environmental concerns. This is exemplified in the study presented in the article “Biophilia Valuation as an Analytical Tool: The Psyche of Ruth in Susan Hill’s *In the Springtime of the Year*,” where the biophilic facets of the character Ruth are examined through nine essential characteristics of human species by concluding “[p]reservation of nature is justified not just in terms of its economic and material advantages but, far more importantly, for the enhanced possibility of satisfying a variety of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual demands in the human animal” (Reeshma and Sylusü 301).

Also, within environmental criticism, biophilia can serve as a lens through which literary texts are analyzed and evaluated in terms of their representation and relationship with the natural environment. This concept is explored in-depth in the analysis of Cormac McCarthy’s *Suttree*, where Raja, A. J. S., & Kaviaras, K. (2022) utilize biophilia to understand the complex interactions between humans and nature (453). Their research highlights how McCarthy’s semi-autobiographical novel reveals a deep affinity and complexity in the human relationship with the natural world, suggesting that the biophilic tendencies in *Suttree* reflect an inherent inclination towards nature and life-like processes (457). Biophilia, in this context, influences characters’ perceptions of and relationships with the natural environment as seen in environmental literature. Highlighting the negative impacts of anthropocentric behaviors, biophilia enriches



environmental criticism by offering a criticism of human actions and their effects on the natural world. For instance, Ji's study of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) presents the characters' monkeywrenching activities and the dissemination of degrowth values through their words and actions, providing an exemplary exploration of the potential of biophilia in environmental criticism (61).<sup>3</sup>

An example of biophilia in American literature is found in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) where Thoreau analyzes the dynamics of human-nature interaction. Saunders, in "Biophilia in Thoreau's *Walden*," observes that Thoreau's narrative effectively aligns with what is currently referred to as the biophilia hypothesis—a concept attracting scholarly attention across disciplines such as biology, anthropology, psychology, cognitive science, and the arts (1). Thoreau's text advocates for the significance of nurturing a connection with the natural world, positing that such engagement is beneficial for both psychological and physiological health. He suggests that proximity to nature can enhance happiness and provide a sense of completeness, contrasting sharply with the alienation felt in an increasingly mechanized and industrialized society. Thoreau encapsulates this sentiment in *Walden*, stating, "He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings" (241). Thoreau's works emphasize the value of interacting with nature and how it has a positive impact on both mental and physical health as claimed "Thoreau walked his way to a self-preservation that was simultaneously preservation of the environment" (Cirby 61). Furthermore, Thoreau's "Walking" (1862) and "Wild Apples" (1862) present his understanding of nature and the place of biophilia in his writings. His works have influenced some other nature writers sharing his reverence for nature, including "Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, and Barry Lopez" (Slovic 3). In this regard, some writers have been influenced by Thoreau's reverence for nature, and his ideas have continued to shape environmental thought and literature over the years.

Because both biophilia and ecopsychology are concerned with the link between human

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<sup>3</sup> Ph.D. Dissertation.

well-being and nature, ecopsychology may contribute to environmental literature by providing a perspective on the relationship. Ecopsychology in environmental literature explores themes of nature, conservation, and human behavior's influence on the environment since environmental literature in general tries to raise awareness about environmental concerns and urge readers to take action to preserve the planet. Thus, as Scott Slovic defines, nature writers and ecocritics become "students of the human mind, literary psychologists" (4). To clarify, Thoreau's writings, especially in *Walden*, highlight the significance of establishing a connection with the natural environment suggesting that such interactions can enhance both psychological and physiological well-being. Through his detailed study of Walden Lake, Thoreau explores the potential benefits of nature engagement on mental and physical health. Thoreau's perspective on human interaction with nature is encapsulated in a passage from *Walden*: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (90). His statement suggests that Thoreau views immersion in nature as a means to gain a deeper understanding of oneself and one's role in the world. He considers nature to be a valuable teacher and source of inspiration positing that engagement with the natural world can enhance an individual's self-awareness and environmental appreciation. Moreover, Thoreau emphasizes the significance of being in nature for the human psyche by saying:

In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me. (132)

His interpretation demonstrates Thoreau's appreciation of the healing and restorative effects of nature on the human psyche and his belief that nature can provide a sense of comfort and companionship that is essential for human well-being.

In his essay "Solitude," Thoreau explores the concept of withdrawing from societal interactions to engage with nature, suggesting that such solitude can offer a valuable perspective and enhance awareness. He articulates, "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and

dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude” (135). His statement suggests that solitude enables a reflective consideration of one’s place in the world fostering a deeper appreciation for the intricacies and beauty of the natural environment, which could lead to a heightened commitment to environmental conservation. Thoreau’s works compel people to explore their relationship with nature and methods to decrease their environmental impact. Individuals may limit their environmental effects and contribute to the preservation of the earth’s resources for generations to come by living simply and preferring nature above material goods. Hence, Thoreau’s thoughts on solitude and connection with the environment provide an understanding of the psychological and ecological benefits of living in harmony with nature.

Heidi A. Lawrence, in “Continuums of Fantasy, Reality, and Kinship: An Ecopsychological Reading of Madeleine L’Engle’s Children’s and Adolescent Fiction,”<sup>4</sup> highlights the contribution of ecopsychology to literature. He notes, “Importantly, in working to develop a therapeutic modality that helps people to recognize, understand, and try to overcome the psychological damage they have sustained, ecopsychologists and ecotherapists do not deny the environmental problems surrounding us” (19). His acknowledgment forms the basis for using ecopsychology not just as a means of therapy but as a critical lens in literature, aiming to raise awareness about environmental issues. Lawrence further argues that ecopsychologists “are very aware of these issues, as well as of the more frightening ways in which nature can behave, and acknowledge them” (19) which takes place in disseminating a consciousness regarding environmental concerns through literature. By incorporating ecopsychology, authors can guide readers to comprehend the multifaceted impacts of human activities on the environment, including the psychological ramifications. To illustrate, according to Erdoğan, ecopsychology can be utilized by authors in literature to craft ecological imagery and storylines that showcase the effects of human activities on the environment, as well as the resulting psychological repercussions (118-119).<sup>5</sup> In the article “Ecopsychology and

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<sup>4</sup> Ph.D. Dissertation

<sup>5</sup> Erdoğan cites the view of ecopsychologists that the individual and the planet are interconnected, and that a failure to acknowledge this connection can have negative implications for mental health, which highlights the need to redefine sanity within an environmental context.

Psychology of Literature: Concretization of Human Biophilia That Loves the Environment in Two Indonesian Novels,” Ahmadi, Syukur Ghazali, and Dermawan delve into how ecopsychology underpins environmental literature and its significance within ecocriticism. They argue for the indispensability of an interdisciplinary approach to literature, asserting, “Literature, from an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary perspective, is urgently needed by literary researchers so that they—the researchers—can associate literature with multidisciplinary sciences so that the results of literary research can be more comprehensive” (47). Their stance helps establish the connection between environmental literature and ecopsychology through the lens of multiple disciplines. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the integral role of ecocriticism in contextualizing ecopsychology within the realm of environmental literature, which is articulated by highlighting that “Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (Glotfelty 19). Through this, the authors accentuate the dynamic relationship between ecopsychology and environmental literature, framed by the comprehensive view offered by ecocriticism on the symbiosis of nature and culture.

Scott Slovic’s article “Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology” discusses the connection between ecocriticism and ecopsychology, drawing upon Stephen and Rachel Kaplan’s analysis of environmental consciousness from a psychological angle. Slovic elaborates on the Kaplans’ idea, stating, “Although we may generally feel certainty when we perceive external reality, we are actually making what Kaplan calls ‘best guesses’ and not perceiving everything thoroughly, in detail. The reasons for this perceptual process are, of course, understandable” (356). His observation points out a common human oversight even when individuals believe they fully understand their natural surroundings, their perception may be superficial, contributing to a disconnect between humans and the natural world. This disconnect is a focal point in ecocriticism, which scrutinizes human separation from nature. Ecocriticism explores this theme through the lens of nature writing, which, according to Slovic, “Contemporary nature writing is how this literature translates into concrete changes in readers’ attitudes

toward the environment, and into more environmentally sound behavior” (364). Similarly, ecopsychology investigates the dynamics between humans and the natural environment, particularly its influence on mental health and well-being. Therefore, the integration of ecocriticism and ecopsychology offers a comprehensive perspective on environmental literature because both disciplines illuminate the psychological underpinnings of human-nature relations and the transformative power of nature writing. As Slovic remarks, “Nature writing is a literature of hope in its assumption that the elevation of consciousness may lead to wholesome political change, but this literature is also concerned, and perhaps primarily so, with interior landscapes, with the mind itself” (368). The synthesis of ecocriticism and ecopsychology highlights the dual focus of nature writing promoting external ecological change and exploring the internal psychological landscape. Through such narratives, literature can help prompt a rethinking of how humans interact with nature, potentially sparking an environmental change.

Exploring Richard Powers’ *The Overstory* (2018) and *Bewilderment* (2021) can shed light on how ecopsychology and biophilia are intricately woven into environmental narratives. These novels provide a deep dive into the emotional and psychological bonds that characters forge with the natural world illuminating the consequences of environmental degradation. Powers portrays, “They are all have dedicated their lives to preserve nature in their own way, to keep the existence of the forests for the importance of humans’ life in the future” (Safina 57) highlighting a collective endeavor towards environmental conservation. This analysis aims to unveil the complex interplay between human psychology and nature, investigating how a tainted environment affects human psyche and vice versa, and underlines the critical need for ecological preservation as echoed in Powers’ narratives. Richard Powers, celebrated for his insightful exploration of science, technology, and human emotions, has garnered prestigious accolades such as the 2006 National Book Award for *The Echo Maker* and the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for *The Overstory* (RCW Literary Agency). His narrative prowess is lauded for its stylistic excellence and deep character portrayal (Bedi 837) offering readers an understanding of characters’ inner lives.

The urgency of fostering a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature is illustrated by the environmental crises of the century, from climate change to biodiversity loss, which threaten both the planet and human livelihoods. Ecopsychology, drawing parallels between environmental health and mental well-being, emphasizes the importance of reconnecting with nature to mitigate psychological vulnerabilities stemming from environmental exploitation. Edward O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis, suggesting an innate human affinity towards nature, becomes a beacon of hope in addressing the detachment from the natural world. This thesis ventures into the eco-psychological interpretation of Powers' latest works, examining how degraded environments impact human psychology and well-being. *The Overstory* offers an exploration of characters' connections with trees, revealing how environmental healing and character development are interlinked. Meanwhile, *Bewilderment* explores the anthropocentric exploitation of nature, delving into the intricate relationship between humans and the environment. Through these narratives, Powers navigates the dual perspective of biophilia and ecopsychology, presenting a compelling dialogue on the human-nature connection.

By dissecting the psychological underpinnings of environmental change as portrayed in *The Overstory* and *Bewilderment*, this thesis highlights the impacts of ecological degradation and the imperative for conservation efforts. The thesis explores the themes of biophilia and ecopsychology in Richard Powers' novels, *The Overstory* and *Bewilderment*, through an ecopsychological framework. Chapter 1 examines *The Overstory* by describing the experiences of nine characters and their connections with the natural environment. It illustrates the psychological effects of deforestation on those with a strong affinity for trees and emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the human-nature connection to foster a sustainable and harmonious relationship. Chapter 2 addresses *Bewilderment*, discussing the exploitation of nature and analyzing the linkage between humans and the natural world. It presents an examination of the human relationship with nature and the potential consequences of neglecting or destroying natural habitats. Chapter 3 focuses on ecological restoration, emphasizing the intentional recovery of degraded ecosystems and the importance of forest conservation. It emphasizes the significance of ecological restoration not only for

the physical environment but also for the human psyche, discussing the psychological reflections of environmental changes due to human activities. The methodology integrates perspectives from ecopsychology and biophilia to highlight the human affinity for nature and the psychological impacts of its degradation, aiming to contribute to the discourse on environmental stewardship and mental health awareness.

**CHAPTER 1**

**BIOPHILIA AND ECOPSYCHOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING  
NATURE'S NARRATIVE IN *THE OVERSTORY***

*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.  
What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From  
the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and  
have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and  
muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is  
concealed even under what are called the games and  
amusements of mankind.*

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Published in 2018, *The Overstory* delves into humanity's intricate relationship with the natural world, weaving in themes of biophilia and ecopsychology. It narrates the efforts of a diverse group to save an ancient forest in the Pacific Northwest. Damery notes the novel's exploration of time and space, highlighting how Powers "introduces characters that exist in different decades (and centuries) and in different parts of the United States" (*The Overstory View* 33). The book not only captivates with its detail but also provokes thought on the urgency of preserving the natural surroundings. According to Riem, it promotes "a deep pre-patriarchal (or pre-dominator) partnership relationship with life and nature, urging a reconnection with our innate, native and sacred wisdom" (28). Structured in four parts— "Roots," "Trunk," "Crown," and "Seeds"—the novel employs a nonlinear narrative, interlacing multiple storylines and perspectives. Also, the novel does not have a single, unified narrator. Instead, it features a third-person omniscient narrative voice that shifts focus among several characters. The narrative style allows the reader to see the thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of the characters. This approach, as Markovits in *The Guardian* observes, challenges Powers to "conjure narrative momentum out of thin air, again and again" (1). His success in this, partly, is attributed to his ability "at describing trees" (1).

In "Roots," Powers introduces several characters and their connections to trees. Nicholas Hoel inherits a family farm with a surviving chestnut tree, while Mimi Ma, after her father's suicide under a mulberry tree, continues her life as a ceramic engineer.



Adam Appich, associated with a maple tree in his family home, becomes fascinated by social psychology after a family tragedy. Other characters include Ray and Dorothy, who bond over planting trees, and Douglas Pavlicek, whose life changes after saved by a banyan tree during the Vietnam War. Neelay Mehta, paralyzed after a fall from an oak tree, becomes a successful game developer inspired by nature. Patricia Westerford, a dendrologist who discovers that trees communicate, faces professional ruin but later finds redemption in nature. Olivia Vandergriff, who has a near-death experience, is drawn to activism. In “Trunk,” Olivia goes to California to join activists fighting to save the California redwoods. She meets Nick Hoel and others, including Mimi and Douglas, as they join forces to protect trees. Neelay creates a successful video game company, and Patricia writes a bestselling book on trees. Adam decides to study the psychological profiles of environmental activists. The activists’ efforts lead them to take extreme measures, including living in the branches of a giant redwood and committing acts of arson to halt logging. Olivia dies in an explosion during one such attempt. In “Crown,” Adam returns to academia, Nick becomes a transient activist artist, Mimi becomes a therapist, and Douglas lives in seclusion. Dorothy and Ray reconnect over their shared love of trees, and Patricia starts a seed vault. In “Seeds,” Adam is sentenced to prison, while Mimi attains a form of enlightenment. Ray and Dorothy allow their yard to grow wild, and Ray eventually dies from a stroke. Nick continues his activist art.

*The Overstory* portrays the connections between humans and trees, prompting readers to reflect on the ecological impact of human actions and encouraging a greater respect for nature. Powers’ narrative stance challenges the traditional anthropocentric view, as Masiero suggests, by urging a broader comprehension of the environment (138). Within its pages, the narrative weaves together the lives of diverse characters, such as “A cuckolded lawyer, a Vietnam veteran, a Japanese immigrant’s engineer daughter, and a disabled video game magnate, among others” (Wardell 1), showcasing their unique backgrounds and experiences. Despite their varied pasts, these individuals form a cohesive community bound by a mutual aim which is preserving nature. Furthermore, trees are not merely background scenery; they become central to the narrative, symbolizing a deep-rooted bond between human and non-human life. Powers illustrates this connection: “You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor. A

billion and a half years ago, the two of you parted ways. But even now, after an immense journey in separate directions, that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes” (*The Overstory* 289).

It is also possible to examine the different relationship between humans and nature presented by Powers and to examine the relationship between characters and nature within an ecopsychological understanding when considered within the framework of ecocriticism. To explain further, ecopsychology invites the reader to comprehend the cognition and consciousness of other beings, such as trees, by highlighting the characters’ relationship to the natural environment and their commitment to conserving it. As Powers asserts in an interview with Hamner, “Trees exhibit flexibility in the face of change and challenge that we used to think was exclusively animal in nature. We have depended on trees not just for the invention of civilization but for our very existence. Without them, no us” (“Here’s to Unsuicide: An Interview with Richard Powers” 1). By doing so, Powers emphasizes that humans should not approach nature with their perceptions, but rather regard nature as a living symbiotic community, which Leopold also proposes in land ethics: “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect” (14).

In *The Overstory*, the emphasizes how people’s psychological well-being is linked to environmental health by providing the negative effects of environmental degradation on human mental health through characters and by depicting people as part of a larger community. To conduct an ecopsychological study of the novel, it is necessary to evaluate how the characters’ psychological and emotional states affect their connection to the natural world and how ecopsychological concepts intersect with their attitudes and behaviors toward the environment. Besides that, the characters’ encounters with nature and the following influence on their view of their place in the world give a perspective through which to analyze the potential of environmental healing and the devastating impact of environmental dangers on mental health. In this section of the thesis, prior to the analysis of the characters’ experiences through the lens of ecopsychology concepts and principles, how certain characters’ childhood experiences with nature, as presented in “Roots” section, have contributed to their later

environmental actions will be discussed. This analysis will provide insight into the interplay between early childhood experiences with nature and adult environmental awareness, highlighting the role that ecopsychology plays in shaping their relationships with the natural world. Ultimately, this examination will contribute to an understanding of the importance of fostering positive and meaningful connections with nature in childhood to cultivate a lifelong sense of environmental responsibility and care.

### 1.1 THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF HUMANS AND NATURE

Richard Powers presents a narrative that forces readers to “view human existence from the overstory of time which many environmental theorists suggest is essential for conceptualizing issues like climate change, with implications stretching far into the geologic future,” (Damery 35) and highlights the devastating effects of human influence on the Earth and nature. Rather than approaching the relationship of the novel’s nine characters with nature from an anthropocentric perspective, Powers adopts a biophilic perspective, placing trees at the central point in the novel as claimed by Cryer “Powers himself seems to veer away from such hopelessness. His accounts of trees’ fecund beauty resonate with ‘biophilia,’ the idea popularized by eminent biologist E.O. Wilson that people are genetically wired to connect and identify with other living things” (1). Powers articulates the relationship with trees by highlighting the roles individual trees play within the story. For instance, the Hoel Chestnut becomes almost a family member to Iowa farmers who document its existence over a century, treating it as “an ongoing portrait of one of their more eccentric uncles” (*The Overstory* 58). Furthermore, the individual trees associated with the Appich children— “elm, ash, oak, and maple”—enrich their lives through a mystical connection, hinting at a form of transference of traits or destinies between the trees and the children. Gregory Day highlights in his review that “It conveys its very own arboreal intelligence through biophilic renditions of its characters, all of whom have had their inner lives somehow changed” (1). His observation marks the novel’s deep dive into biophilia and ecopsychology, illustrating Richard Powers’ exploration of the transformative power of nature on character development because he maps out the bonds between humans and trees, revealing the effects these connections can have on both individual lives and society at large.

Wilson's biophilia hypothesis suggests a natural human affinity for nature and a need for connection with the environment. In *The Overstory*, characters like video game developer Neelay Metha, academic Adam Appich, psychologist Mimi, and artist Nicholas Hoel showcase biophilia, potentially inherited from their families, highlighting the role of familial influence in nurturing a love for nature. White and Stoecklin note that

Children have an innate, genetically predisposed tendency to explore and bond with the natural world known as biophilia, i.e. love of nature. Evidence of biophilia has been observed in children even younger than two. For children's natural inclination of biophilia to develop they must be given developmentally appropriate opportunities to learn about the natural world based on sound principles of child development and learning. (Kellert 1997; Sobel 2002; Chawla 2006)

This is reflected in how environmental awareness, instilled by their parents, leads to the expression of biophilia in each character. Neelay channels his appreciation for nature into creating a video game, *Mastery*, that allows players to engage with virtual natural landscapes. Adam and Mimi express their biophilic inclinations through their professional work, with Adam exploring the motivations of environmental activists and Mimi through her unique approach to psychology. Nicholas's art, often featuring natural materials, serves as his biophilic expression, further emphasizing the diverse manifestations of this innate connection to nature.

Feith introduces Neelay as a "computer wizard, the son of an Indian immigrant" (103) whose narrative begins when his father introduces him to a computer system. His dual fascination is nurtured by his father who encourages him to view nature through a technological prism, as Powers illustrates: "The boy thinks: Something slow and purposeful wants to turn every human building into the soil. But his father holds the photo in front of Neelay as if it proves the happiest destiny" (*The Overstory* 102). From an early age, Neelay is drawn to both technology and nature, seeing parallels between programming concepts like branching and the natural world. His biophilic leanings are not just theoretical; they manifest in his childhood activities, such as his attempt to combine kite-making with computer coding for his mother. His blending of interests leads to a pivotal moment in his school life when, distracted by his project, Neelay faces reprimand from his teacher. In an act of defiance and frustration, he climbs a tree to evade punishment only to slip from a branch (110), illustrating his complex

relationship with both technology and nature from a young age.

Neelay's permanent disability shifts his focus more intensely towards coding and computing, furthering his belief that "The seed his father plants in him will eat the world" (104). This indicates that his interest in technology not only complements but also enhances his biophilic tendencies, suggesting an innate inclination towards integrating nature with technology. The "seed" metaphor reflects the dual influence of external interactions, such as with trees, and inherent predispositions in developing Neelay's connection to the natural world. Neelay's creation of video games, especially *Mastery*, presents his biophilic tendencies. His games, inspired by unique trees like the Queensland Bottle Tree, reflect an inherent affinity for nature. This alignment with Wilson's biophilia, influenced by both genetics and environment (Krčmářová 5), indicates the authenticity he seeks in representing nature in his games. His approach combines a deep appreciation for natural beauty and complexity with his passion for technology, fulfilling his biophilic inclinations while connecting with nature through his creative work. His synthesis of interests highlights the potential of technology to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural world, embodying a nuanced view of the human-nature-technology nexus. The game that "he was destined to make" (*The Overstory* 178), *Mastery* is a big success for him. It portrays a world where players conquer and exploit nature for their gain. As described by Powers, "People from six continents pour into the upgraded place—frontiersmen, pilgrims, farmers, miners, warriors, priests. They form guilds and consortiums" (215). The game embodies the anti-ecological worldview of industrialization, where humans seek to dominate and control nature for their benefit. Moreover, the game promotes endless growth, a central tenet of industrial society. As Powers notes, "the spent, filled-up cities of the industrialized planet have willed this thing into being, just in time: the savior of the gospel of endless growth" (215).

Despite the game's overtly anti-ecological themes such as "easy and endless shape-shifting, in a kingdom forever growing" (193), Neelay's engagement with nature is still present. His biophilic tendencies drive him to create an accurate representation of the natural world in his game as depicted "The game presents almost as many meaningful choices as real life, or, as his staff has taken to calling it, a little derisively" (193), even

if it is a world where nature is ultimately conquered and exploited. In this regard, Neelay's game *Mastery* can reflect the complex and often contradictory relationship between people and environment in an industrial society. It reveals a deeper critique of what Neelay identifies as the "Midas problem," described as "Endless, pointless prosperity" (275), a metaphor for the unchecked expansion and exploitation that characterizes the Anthropocene epoch. Ostalska sharpens this statement, suggesting that "*Mastery* is a computer game perfectly encapsulating the Anthropocene mentality about creating the world only to conquer it" (296), highlighting a reckless disregard for the environmental consequences of such endeavors. The recognition of these systemic flaws prompts Neelay to reassess his own contributions to this paradigm. His reflections lead him to acknowledge the intrinsic value of the natural world, a realization that diverges from the destructive path of unbridled industrialization and technological exploitation. His awareness is not just a personal awakening but an indictment of the broader societal obsession with growth at the expense of ecological health.

However, Neelay's biophilic orientation emerges as a guiding principle for his subsequent work. His design philosophy for the latest iteration of his game, *Mastery*, reflects a commitment to ecological principles, advocating for a model of growth that is sustainable and regenerative, aiming to disincentivize destructive behaviors in the virtual ecosystem: "No new continents. No sudden spawning of new mineral deposits. Regeneration only at realistic rates. No rising from the grave. A wrong choice in the game should lead to permadeath" (*The Overstory* 276). His reading of Patricia's *The Secret Forest* inspires him to conceptualize a game that prioritizes the flourishing of the world over individual gain, a radical departure from conventional game objectives: "There's nothing out there even remotely like it. We'd be the first. Imagine a game with the goal of growing the world, instead of yourself" (276). By integrating his biophilic values into his creative process, Neelay aspires to redefine the gaming experience, teaching players to appreciate the Earth's complexity and the significance of its non-human inhabitants. Also, considering Neelay's perspective on technology with nature, it becomes necessary to consider a "postindustrial" approach within ecopsychology, which sees value in integrating technology and nature for ecological benefits, as suggested by Roszak. This approach emphasizes the potential of technology to enhance

the understanding and appreciation of nature, aligning with Neelay's efforts to create video games that reflect the beauty and complexity of the natural world.

Adam Appich and Mimi Ma are two protagonists in the narrative who exhibit a connection to nature and are involved in environmental activism. Adam, an academic in psychology, has a keen interest in the natural world, demonstrated by his early observations of insects and other creatures on a maple tree as presented:

He keeps to himself, but even the subdivision's barest lot is home to millions of creatures. The Golden Guide to Insects and a jar with a punched lid turns the loneliest Sunday afternoon into a collector's dream. Armed with The Golden Guide to Fossils, he concludes that the bumps and nubs in the front flagstones are the teeth of ichthyosaurs who went extinct long before mammals were anything but a sideshow on the forest floor. (59)

His academic pursuits include studying "cognitive blindness" (197), with a specific focus on "transformative potential as a function of strong normative in-group favoritism" (197). His research explores how identification with a group influences behavior and decision-making, often leading individuals to favor their own group over others as explained by Everett, Faber and Crockett "Ingroup favoritism—the tendency to favor members of one's own group over those in other groups—is well documented, but the mechanisms driving this behavior are not well understood" (1). By delving into these psychological aspects, Adam seeks to understand the mechanisms behind group identity and its impact on individual and collective actions, particularly in the context of environmental activism. His work suggests that harnessing the power of group dynamics could be crucial in motivating people to make ethical decisions that may diverge from their group's norms.

Mimi Ma, on the other hand, is a ceramic engineer. She is the daughter of a Chinese immigrant, and her love for nature is presented through her admiration of the pine trees in front of her office. To illustrate, when she sits under the trees, she feels like "a hospice patient self-administering morphine" (173) because the smell of trees runs through her body from "the bloodstream to her body's provinces" to "her thoughts" (173). After Olivia's incident, Mimi becomes an "unconventional therapist" (269) because her treatment method is to sit in complete silence and make eye contact with

her patients. While Adam Appich's focus is on the study of "transformative potential as a function of strong normative in-group favoritism" (197), Mimi Ma's psychology career takes a different path. Rather than studying the human mind based on a scientific perspective, Mimi's approach to psychology is more mystical and experiential. However, both Adam and Mimi's biophilic tendencies drive their activism and support their passion for environmental causes. Their deep love and appreciation for the natural world push them to fight for its protection and preservation.

Appich's love of nature and connection to the natural world is evident from the very beginning of the book. In the first chapter, Powers describes Appich's childhood in Illinois, where he spent his days wandering through the trees which his father has planted for Appich's children "Each child's tree has its excellence: the ash's diamond-shaped bark, the walnut's long compound leaves, the maple's shower of helicopters, the vase-like spread of the elm, the ironwood's fluted muscle" (58). As previously noted, the presence of biophilic tendencies in childhood is crucial in understanding a child's natural inclinations. Despite Adam's father's small efforts to instill a sense of nature in his children, his attitude towards his family is dysfunctional. This dysfunction is illustrated in two key moments. In one instance, Adam, while painting, imagines his father's mocking response to his work: "Where's Daddy?" his mother asks. Adam sulks, but inserts the man. He paints his father holding this very drawing in his stick hands, laughing and saying, "What are these—trees? Look outside! Is that what a tree looks like?" (55). His imagined derisive attitude not only reflects Adam's perception of his father's dismissiveness but also highlights a lack of encouragement and support within the family. The dysfunction is further highlighted by the father's abusive behavior: "Adam's father learns of the slap that evening. He teaches the boy a lesson that involves twisting his wrist until it fractures" (59). Such violent actions create an environment of fear and trauma, completely negating any positive influence the father might have intended.

Specifically, Adam's older sister Leigh has repeatedly fled from home at a young age, and his father Leonard has exhibited violent behavior. Furthermore, Adam's brother Emmett has consistently bullied him since childhood. Thus, Adam always seeks his



breath among the trees or the animals to escape from his family and isolate himself. For example, after his father broke Adam's wrist, "Adam climbs up into his maple as high as he can and doesn't come down until dinner" (60). Appich's appreciation for nature, his desire for solitude in natural environments, and his respect for all living things, as evidenced by his concern for a tree's well-being when his father acted rudely towards it while planting, are all examples of his biophilic tendencies. Feith's analysis of Adam suggests "Trees almost become characters in their own right, literalizing their characterization by association according to a mechanism of projection and identification" (104). Adam's biophilic tendencies, which involve emotional "affiliation with nature" (Wilson 134), lead him to associate trees with humans, which is illustrated in several instances throughout the book. For example, when Adam's sister Leigh runs away from home, he links her victimization to the blight that affected her Dutch Elm, saying, "Adam takes the elm plaque he inscribed for his sister and throws it on the fire" (*The Overstory* 64). Feith also notes that Adam demonstrates a "bout of sympathetic magic in identifying his siblings to their emblematic trees and his panic at the sight of the swaddled roots of his baby brother's sapling during transportation. His belief is that if the tree's roots can't breathe the child will die" (104). The examples highlight how Adam's biophilic tendencies shape his perception of the natural world, and how he empathizes with the trees. Moreover, his tendencies play a significant role in driving his activism for environmental causes, as they reflect his deep connection to and love for the natural world. By valuing and respecting the natural world, Appich recognizes the need of protecting it and takes specific actions to do so.

Once a college student, Adam wanted to study "in-group favoritism" (197). Adam, who once had biophilic tendencies as a child, changes his perspective on environmental activism as he grows older, as "A boy he knew once jumped into a hole and risked live burial to protect his unborn brother's sapling from harm. That boy is dead" (198). Adam's ignorance and indifference toward environmental issues have transformed into a sense of urgency and responsibility. However, he still struggles with the idea of "plant rights" and "plant personhood" (198). His reluctance to embrace radical ideas in environmental activism is also reflected in his dislike of activists whom he finds to be "orthodoxy," "sloganeering," and "boring" (198). His change in attitude can be

attributed to his traumatic childhood experiences and the societal norms that reject radical environmental activism. Adam conducts “250 interviews with activists along the Lost Coast” (234) for his Ph.D. dissertation, as stated in the novel. During his process of collecting data, he meets Maidenhair (Olivia) and Watchmen (Nick) and joins them up on the Mimas. Adam expresses his desire to learn about “people who believe that plants are persons, too” (235), and while on the tree, they share stories about the deceased and their relationship with nature. Furthermore, Adam’s observations and experiences lead him to understand that certain aspects of faith and law are hidden behind common sense. As a result, he concludes that his research is intact, but he has changed (239). Therefore, Adam’s experiences, along with his appreciation of nature, lead him to a greater understanding of the importance of environmental activism and the need to protect the natural world as “Adam Appich makes bewildering turns from near-autistic child to reclusive academic to bleeding heart activist” (Raman 1).

After Adam’s arrest, he returns to Santa Cruz and writes a conclusion to his research question. In his study, he finds out that “CERTAIN TENDENCIES of radical environmentalist temperament emerge from the data. Core values, a sense of identity” (240). Adam’s attachment to natural tendencies can be attributed to his biophilic orientation which drives his activism for environmental causes. After all, he cannot go on with his life because “Something has broken in him” (240) and “A fact struggles to escape him” (241). Consequently, Appich’s attention turns towards activism and the environment. He becomes “his own object of study” (243), channeling his passion and energy into environmental causes. He believes that the natural world is essential to human life as “he once helped formulate: CONTROL KILLS CONNECTION HEALS!” (261). The concept can be related to ecopsychology since ecopsychologists argue that humans have an innate connection to the natural world and that this connection is vital to their mental health and well-being. However, modern society often encourages control over nature with the concepts “namely military actions, consumerism, and industrialization” (Martin et al. 6111) rather than connection with it, leading to a sense of disconnection and alienation. By rejecting control and embracing connection, Appich’s activism is aligned with the goals of ecopsychology which seeks

to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of their relationship with the natural world.

Mimi Ma is another character who shows biophilic tendencies like Adam. Mimi's innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life becomes evident in her love for nature and her concern for the environment, which later pushes her to be an activist in Redwood protests. To explain, her father, Winston Ma, a "Muslim Chinese guy who loves math, American cars, elections, and camping" (*The Overstory* 38), plants mulberry trees in the garden as "an attempt to seek the blessings of the Mulberry tree" (Jayanthi and Maheshini 113). As presented, "The mulberry puts forth its messy clusters of achenes." Mimi, the firstborn at nine years old, sits among the fruit spatters with her little sisters, her clothes stained red, "bemoaning their family's fate" (*The Overstory* 37). The author conveys Winston's affinity for national parks and Yellowstone through phrases such as "loves his national parks" (41) and "his beloved Yellowstone" (42). Moreover, Winston's connection to nature is not merely superficial, as his activities in the wilderness have an impact on his mental well-being. To illustrate, the narrator notes that "Fishing, he has solved life. Fishing, he passes the final exam" (42), suggesting that Winston finds a sense of inner peace through his interactions with the natural surroundings. His sentiment towards nature is reflected by Mimi's perception on her father's connection to nature, as presented by the narrator: "He's their descendant" (43). Winston's reverence for the natural world extends beyond his enjoyment of it; he also exhibits a deep respect for the animals and ecosystems that inhabit it. When confronted by a bear during a camping trip, Winston communicates with the animal and gently pushes it away, remarking: "I tell him, people are very stupid. They forget everything where they come from, where they go. I say: Don't worry. Human being leaving this world, very soon" (44). This moment highlights Winston's sensitivity to how humans disrupt nature and his desire to coexist with other living creatures as a whole. Ma's biophilic tendencies play a role in driving his daughter Mimi's environmental activism. By instilling in her a deep appreciation for the natural world and modeling a responsible and respectful approach to interacting with it, Winston provides Mimi with the tools she needs to become an advocate for environmental preservation. Winston Ma's role in the narrative adds depth to the depiction of the Ma family's interactions and presents the

novel's themes of ecological consciousness and activism. The Ma family's connection to the mulberry tree exemplifies how environmental degradation can affect human well-being. The tree's affliction by "mealybugs" and "scale insects mass," along with the changing color of its leaves, symbolizes the wider environmental challenges faced by the characters in the story.

Powers illustrates the parallel decline in the mental well-being of Winston and Charlotte, with Mimi's mother, Charlotte, showing signs of worsening cognitive function alongside the mulberry tree's battle with disease. As the tree's condition deteriorates, marked by "Bacteria blacken the leaves," both parents find themselves unable to reverse the damage. Charlotte's dementia leads her to suggest "bringing in a priest to pray over it," while Winston diligently searches "horticulture bibles" and records "impeccably printed speculations" in his notebooks (45). Leslie Gray, a psychologist who endorses a holistic approach to mental health, reinforces the concept by asserting the necessity of a harmonious relationship with the environment for mental stability. She contends, "You cannot have sanity without a sane relationship with your environment" (Gray 173), highlighting the essential unity between the health of individuals and the health of their surroundings. Winston Ma's distress over the deteriorating condition of the mulberry tree is captured when it is noted, "Mimi has never heard this cheerful, endlessly resourceful man sound so low" (*The Overstory* 45). His despondency stems from the realization that his livelihood, intricately tied to the natural world, faces severe jeopardy due to environmental decline. Winston's despair is articulated through his own words, "My work all done. My silk farm, finish. Fishing going down, a little bit every year. What I do now" (46), expressing a sense of helplessness and loss of direction as his means of sustenance gradually erodes. Winston's deep connection to his environment and the ensuing loss of identity and purpose lead to an outcome. Powers narrates the culmination of Winston's struggle, detailing the moment he "sits under the crumbling mulberry and puts a Smith & Wesson 686 with hardwood grips up to his temple and spreads the workings of his infinite being across the flagstones of the backyard" (47). The tragic decision to end his life under the mulberry tree symbolizes the ultimate impact of environmental degradation on human

psyche and existence, marking a commentary on the relationship between humans and their natural surroundings.

Yasuo Onishi, in the preface to *Ecopsychology: Advances from the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection* (2015), highlights the deep connection between environmental health and human well-being. He emphasizes, “We should be aware that when humankind destroys the earth’s environment, the environment, in turn, devastates humankind. The protection of the earth’s environment and our well-being are intricately intertwined” (Onishi 24). Echoing this sentiment, psychology professor Mary E. Gomes affirms the reciprocal relationship between our external and internal worlds. She points out, “The outer and inner worlds reflect and support one another, which means a healthy ecosystem is inseparable from a healthy psyche. The qualities of our culture that are most damaging to the Earth are also those that are most destructive to the human soul” (Gomes 7), which suggests that the narrative involving the Ma family and the mulberry tree aligns with the concepts of ecopsychology and biophilia. The tree’s decline mirrors the broader issue of environmental degradation and its impact on the characters. The deteriorating health of the tree, representing wider ecological challenges, leads to emotional distress among the characters, manifesting in feelings of despair, a sense of loss, and ultimately, in the tragic choice of suicide.

Mimi Ma’s commitment to environmental activism is influenced by her biophilic orientation, stemming from an intrinsic love and respect for nature that motivates her conservation efforts. This connection to nature becomes especially pronounced following the tragic suicide of her father, marking a pivotal moment that enhances her affinity for the natural world. As Jayanthi observes,

Mimi Ma weeps bitterly standing under the mulberry tree thinking of her father. After the death of her father the tree stands healthy. She believes that it is her father’s soul which safeguards the tree. spends time with the Pine trees near her office during her lunch time and it makes her nostalgic. She remembers her childhood days especially about her father and his love for the Pine tree. She recalls her childhood trips to the park and the Pine trees. (113)

Mimi’s belief that her father’s spirit lives on in the pine trees manifests in her habit of seeking refuge among them during her lunch breaks, finding peace in their presence. The author describes this experience as, “The clean smell of her childhood’s only

untouched days. The music of the trees, too, tuning the wind. She remembers” (*The Overstory* 173). This passage not only highlights her connection to these trees but also suggests that her biophilic tendencies—her natural inclination towards the living world—are rooted in cherished memories and personal loss. Her bond with nature, reinforced by emotional ties to her father and her childhood, emphasizes the depth of Mimi’s biophilia and its role in shaping her environmental activism.

Mimi Ma’s initial hesitation toward environmental activism was influenced by her concerns for her family’s safety, fearing that such actions “would have made her emigrant father come pluck her home in fear of deportation, torture, or worse” (199). Her reluctance is also reflected in her views on political engagement and her aversion to those who aggressively promote their causes, as she dislikes “Getting political. Agitating. She hates agitators, how they’re always in your face about something that has nothing to do with you” (175). Yet, Mimi’s inherent connection to nature, her biophilia, gradually steers her towards environmental advocacy. When Mimi experiences an emotional response to the threat posed to her beloved pines, she feels “Outrage floods into her, the sneakiness of man, a sense of injustice larger than her whole life, the old loss that will never, ever be answered. When her eyes open again, truths rush into her head” (175). Such moments of realization catalyze Mimi’s transition from reluctance to activism, compelling her to confront the forces endangering the forests she cherishes. Her journey into activism is marked by an evolving understanding of the environmental stakes involved, especially during her first protest alongside Douglass. Mimi’s technical expertise allows her to grasp the environmental consequences of logging, recognizing that “a wealthy logging outfit, backed by a pro-industry Forest Circus, is exploiting the power vacuum before a big court decision by rushing through an illegal grab of mixed conifers that have been growing for centuries” (200). Witnessing firsthand the rampant destruction of ancient trees, Mimi’s bond with nature deepens, fueling her determination to safeguard it. Her transformation is not just a personal awakening but signifies a broader shift in perspective, as she becomes part of a collective effort to protect and preserve the natural environment, embodying a change that Gandotra describes: “a change in her, and a sense of awareness peaks through her when battling with other reformists for the conservation of trees” (5). Through her activism, Mimi embodies the

impact that a deep-seated love for nature can have in driving individuals to defend and preserve the natural world for future generations.

Nicholas Hoel's connection to nature has an impact on his beliefs and practices in art. His biophilic education began with his family's Chestnut project, which instilled in him a love for nature because by planting the chestnut tree, Jorgen sows the seeds of love for nature to the next generation. The tradition of photographing the Chestnut tree at the same angle each month and recording its growth and the passage of time became a "ritual devotion" (*The Overstory* 17) for the Hoel family. Through this practice, the Hoels develop an understanding the course of time for trees, which later affects Nick to have "a deep bond with trees" (Safina 61). However, the bond to the tree is threatened by the chestnut blight that ravages the tree, as well as other chestnut trees across the continent. The devastation caused by the blight can be seen in the following passage: "The blight runs along ridgelines, killing off-peak after the peak. A person perched on an overlook above the southern mountains can watch the trunks change to gray-white skeletons in a rippling wave" (*The Overstory* 21). The tragedy impacts the younger generation of Hoels, including Frank Jr., who grows up during the chestnut massacre. On the one hand, he says, "It's very possible that I hate this tree," (21) and on the other hand, he thinks, "It's very possible that I love it more than I loved my father" (21). The devastation wrought by the blight leaves him conflicted as he simultaneously feels a deep love and hatred for the tree which he associates with his father's memory.

The Hoel Chestnut stands as a remarkable survivor of the blight epidemic, referred to as "a chestnut that escaped the holocaust" (23), embodying the Hoel family's enduring legacy. Frank Jr.'s photographic record of this tree over generations weaves together the narrative of the family's trials and triumphs. The narrator remarks, "The photos hide everything: the twenties that do not roar for the Hoels. The Depression that costs them two hundred acres and sends half the family to Chicago" (24), indicates that these images capture more than just the tree's resilience; they encapsulate the family's varied experiences, including personal and societal challenges. The photographs thus become a conduit through which the intricate history of the Hoels and their deep ties to the land are revealed. Riem's observation about the temporal existence of trees, "The trees move

at their own speed, in their own time, which seems tremendously slow to us, almost to the point of appearing nonexistent” (36), parallels the life of the Hoel Chestnut. It grows at a pace indifferent to human concerns, representing a constant and serene presence amidst the volatility of human affairs. The narrative contrasts the tree’s steadfastness with the transient and often destructive nature of human actions. The blight, introduced through human intervention, underlines the potential harm inflicted on the environment by human endeavors. Riem further elucidates that trees, with their deep roots and enduring presence, stand as silent witnesses to human encroachments marked by “bombs, cement, intensive farming, greed, and exploitation” (36). For the Hoel family, the chestnut tree not only symbolizes their bond with nature but also serves as a reminder of the need for harmony with the environment, illustrating “the family’s progressive grounding and growth in their new land” (*The Overstory* 33). The duality highlights the tree’s role as both a beacon of natural resilience and a mirror reflecting the family’s journey and humanity’s broader ecological impact.

Nicholas Hoel, who grew up with the Hoel tree and its history, has been interested in nature since he was little because “No other family in the county had a tree like the Hoel tree. And no other family in Iowa could match the multi generation photo project for pure weirdness” (27). Thus, he starts sketching on the farm for the first time. His connection to nature and his family’s chestnut tree can be seen as a manifestation of biophilia because his biophilic orientation not only shapes Nicholas’s personal beliefs and actions but also influences his artistic inspiration as explained by the author “He lay on his back on the Fourth of July, looking up into the spreading tree while everyone else pitched horseshoes. There was a geometry to this constant splitting, a balance to the various thicknesses and lengths that lay beyond his powers as an artist to reveal” (28). As a future artist, he finds inspiration in the natural world that surrounds him since he can recognize the complex geometry and balance of the tree’s branches and acknowledges that it is beyond his artistic abilities to capture it fully. Nick, called Watchman by Olivia during the Redwood protests, illustrates another facet of biophilic inclination leading to environmental activism. Similar to Mimi’s evolution from political indifference to active protest for the sake of the trees she cherishes, Nick leverages his artistic talent to champion environmental causes. His approach, however,



seeks to catalyze broader awareness and engagement, using his art not just as personal expression but as a tool for public advocacy. Unlike traditional activists, Nick envisions his art as “a medium that will be seen by millions” (247), employing public spaces as his canvas during protests because “Their walls are his best available canvas” (247).

Nick’s connection to the natural world is vividly displayed through the imagery in his artwork. Following Olivia’s death, he creates a mural where “he adorns the block caps in stems and twigs, until the letters seem to be sprouting back from the apocalypse. They look like Egyptian hieroglyphs, or the dancing figures of an op-art bestiary” (248). This piece not only showcases his artistic prowess but also his deep-seated reverence for nature, using art to echo his environmental concerns. During his time with Olivia in the Mimas trees, Nick’s inspiration from the surrounding natural beauty is channeled into his art, further highlighting his biophilic tendencies. He dedicates an afternoon to capturing “the mosses that sprout up in every crevice. He sketches the usnea and other hanging lichen that turn the tree into a fairy tale” (222). By focusing on the delicate intricacies of the ecosystem, Nick’s work points out the significance of even the most minute elements of nature. His experience with the Mimas trees not only influences his creative expression but presents the impact of his biophilia on his art, utilizing his talents to communicate his passion for and connection to the natural environment.

Nicholas’ biophilia and artistic practice are inextricably linked, with each reinforcing and enriching the other. His biophilic tendencies motivate him to create art that embraces the beauty of nature and conveys the immediacy of environmental preservation, even as it confronts the destructive effects that humans have on the environment. So much so that, even after the protests, Nick continues to perform his art for nature consciousness as claimed by Riem “After Olivia dies in their attempt at arson, meant to block the destruction of the red giant’s forests, Nick wanders as a nomadic and continues to write his artistic and provocative messages in nature” (35). The narrator defines the elapsed time as follows: “TWENTY SPRINGS is no time at all. The hottest year ever measured comes and goes. Then another. Then ten more, almost every one of them among the hottest in recorded history. The seas rise” (*The Overstory* 260). The narrator’s definition of time as “twenty springs is no time at all” emphasizes the speed

of environmental change and destruction which motivates Nick's environmental advocacy. As the hottest years in recorded history continue and sea levels rise, the urgency of the situation becomes clearer. Nick's biophilic instincts inspire him to produce work that not only showcases the beauty of the natural world but also draws attention to the harm that is occurring. During this period, Nick is presented as being in hiding and working on his art (261). He seems to have lost his way, although he is surrounded by trees guiding him. "In other words, he's lost. But sure enough, the trees around him aren't" (263). He believes that wherever he is, that is where his biggest sculpture will be "until time and living creatures come to transform it" (263).

In completing his most ambitious creation, he incorporates "materials already present on the landscape," "guides downed timber into the emerging structure," and "select branches" that he is able to transport by hand (314). Nick's selection of organic elements for his art piece illustrates a natural affinity and a commitment to align his craft with the environment, indicative of his biophilic inclinations, a nod towards the concept of eco-art. Eco-art recognizes the complex, mutual dependence within nature and how human actions can disrupt its harmony as defined:

The genre of 'ecological art', as originally conceived in the 1990's on the basis of practices that emerged from the late 1960's onwards, covers a variety of artistic practices which are nonetheless united, as social-ecological modes of engagement, by shared principles and characteristics such as: connectivity, reconstruction, ecological ethical responsibility, stewardship of inter-relationships and of commons, non-linear (re)generativity, navigation and dynamic balancing across multiple scales, and varying degrees of exploration of the fabric of life's complexity. (Kagan 1)

As an eco-artist, Nick minimizes his environmental footprint and aligns his artistic expression with the rhythms of the natural world by choosing materials that are readily available in his immediate environment. On a particular day, a man wearing "a red plaid jacket," who is of Native American descent, collaborates with Nick. During this partnership, Nick is haunted by voices uttering "Phrases beyond his full understanding. Injuries that persist" (*The Overstory* 320). This phenomenon of hearing indistinct voices could be interpreted as ecological sorrow, a sense of grief stemming from environmental degradation as explained "The experience of the beauty of the landscape and the attendant eco-sorrow reveals painful truths, such as the artifice of the ontological rift and anthropocentrism, both of which are implicated in destructive relations and

behaviors toward Othered human beings, other species, and the Earth” (Lamonthe 14). Ultimately, Nick’s wooden sculpture, crafted from fallen timber, evolves to spell the significant term: “STILL” (*The Overstory* 329). The art Nick creates, rooted in his bond with the environment and his activist stance, evidences his recognition of nature’s plight as “The most extraordinary outcomes of four billion years of evolution require our assistance” (321). The Native American associate, donned in the red plaid jacket, shares this environmental empathy, highlighting the symbiosis between humanity and the ecosystem. The collaboration leads Nick to an understanding that the flora’s wishes are not obscure but rather guiding, allowing him to position them as they desire rather than imposing his will. As the story unfolds, “Nick’s realization that plants ‘are not difficult to understand,’ and his method of letting the plants ‘show him where they wish to be’ rather than ‘fabricating’ their placement is a reflection of his epiphany” (314).

Nick’s relationship with trees transcends utilitarian use, celebrating them as sentient entities with their narratives and rhythms, which fuel his artistic inspiration. This perspective is supported by Patricia who corroborates the concept that trees have their perception of time. This notion plays a pivotal role in his life and creative endeavors, as demonstrated in his family’s collection of photographs, evidencing his attraction to nature. Riem articulates, “Trees operate on their timeline, which to us, seems exceedingly slow, almost imperceptible” (36), thereby accentuating the disparity in temporal perceptions between humans and trees. Riem’s portrayal of trees as sentient beings, rather than resources for exploitation, emphasizes Nick’s biophilic tendencies and fortifies his engagement with the natural environment. In this regard, Nick personifies the concept of temporal existence within trees, and his interactions with Mimas accentuate this viewpoint. Spending time in the tree, Nick discovers that conventional measures of time dissolve into the tree’s ecosystem rhythm. He observes, “An afternoon, half an hour, a minute, half a sentence, or half a word all seem to merge in scale” (*The Overstory* 211), highlighting nature’s distinct temporal sense compared to human standards.

Upon Mimas’s capture and confinement, Nick dreams of “the Hoel family chestnut” (239). The dream is depicted as, “In the dream, trees mock them. Saving us? How

quintessentially human. Even the mockery spans years” (239), highlighting the difference in temporal understanding between trees and humans. The trees’ laughter in the dream suggests a criticism of human-centric perspectives, as detailed: “The eerie laughter echoing in Nick’s dream hints at a recurring theme in science fiction and apocalyptic narratives: should humanity fail to harmonize with nature, nature will ultimately prevail” (New 9). Nick’s experiences and dreams underscore the importance of adopting nature’s perspective on time and valuing the natural world independently of human temporal frameworks. His artistic endeavors reflect his belief by capturing the slow movements and enduring essence of nature, in stark contrast to the fleeting nature of human existence. Hence, Nick’s sculpture spelling “STILL” symbolizes the need for calm and reflection in a rapidly changing world, as “It represents a quietude, teeming with activity and life, seemingly static to our human perception” (Riem 35). It celebrates nature’s resilience and calls for more responsible stewardship of the Earth.

In *The Overstory*, Powers introduces Mimi, Adam, Nick, and Neelay through their childhood experiences, which play a role in nurturing their bond with nature and shaping their environmental awareness. Each character’s interaction with the natural world marks their distinct pathways to eco-consciousness. Mimi inherits her love for nature from her father, Wiston, which becomes the bedrock of her environmental activism. Adam’s childhood, marked by an aversion to human society, drives him to find refuge and companionship in the wilderness. Nick’s formative years on the Hoel farm deeply influence his artistic pursuits, driving him to capture and preserve nature’s essence through his work. Meanwhile, Neelay combines his technological interests with his admiration for nature, aiming to replicate its intricacies in virtual environments. The book delves into the crucial role trees play in both human life and the environment. In its opening section, “Roots,” the narrative introduces the characters through separate chapters, each associated with a specific tree—Nicholas Hoel with a chestnut tree, Adam Appich with a maple tree, Douglas Pavlicek with a banyan tree, and Neelay Metha with an oak tree. Gouty’s review states, “The trees are connected to the welfare of the world, as are the people who fight to save the forests or to timber them. The fate of all humanity is intertwined with the fate of all the trees” (1), highlighting the interplay of trees, humans, and the broader ecological system.

Powers further explores the intricate connections among different species as evidenced by the statement, “There are a hundred thousand species of love, separately invented, each more ingenious than the last, and every one of them keeps making things” (*The Overstory* 150). Additionally, it addresses the impact of environmental destruction, notably through the observation “Deforestation: a bigger changer of climate than all of the transportation put together. Twice as much carbon in the falling forests than in all the atmosphere” (218). Through these insights, he comments on environmental degradation and illustrates the importance of reevaluating the relationship between humans and nature. Powers uses trees as a symbol to illustrate both the symbiotic relationship between trees and the world, and the natural world’s capacity for regeneration. The book asserts that plants have the ability to reproduce and adjust to environmental shifts, attributing to them qualities of being active, adaptable, capable of subjective perception, and possessing a form of life that is entirely independent from humans: “Plants are active, adaptable, actually capable of subjective perceptions, and, above all, if they possess life in way that is totally independent of us” (Mancuso and Viola 116). The narrative of the chestnut tree belonging to the Hoel family serves as an example of nature’s resilience and adaptability.

It traces back to Jørgen Hoel, Nick’s ancestor, who brought six chestnut seeds from Norway to Iowa. The novel narrates, “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” (11) where despite most seeds not surviving, one tree prospers for years until a lightning strike leaves only one chestnut tree standing. This lone survivor continues to thrive, demonstrating its capacity for self-renewal and recovery within the natural world “goes on flowering” (14). The chestnut tree’s enduring presence, despite the environmental disaster and its non-native origins, showcases nature’s inherent ability to adapt and persist. The tree grows so large over time that it becomes a landmark, used by families for navigation and by locals to direct travelers (16). However, the narrative takes a tragic turn with the introduction of blight from Asia, brought in through Chinese chestnuts imported for decorative purposes in gardens (17). This disease quickly devastates the American chestnut population across the United States. Powers captures the rapid spread of the disease, stating, “Death races across

Connecticut and Massachusetts, jumping dozens of miles a year” (17). Beyond the ecological impact, the blight has economic consequences. Powers characterizes the American chestnut as an invaluable asset, essential to numerous industries and a major component of the eastern forests, now facing inevitable extinction (18).

The magnitude of the loss is further emphasized as Powers details the widespread destruction of these trees, with entire regions witnessing the disappearance of what was once considered a national treasure: “Trees succumb by the hundreds of thousands. A country watches dumbstruck as New England’s priceless chestnuts melt away” (18). Through these observations, Powers not only highlights the ecological crisis but also laments over the economic and cultural void left by the decimation of the American chestnut. Despite the blight pandemic that has wiped out American chestnut trees across the country, the Hoel tree manages to survive. The tree is described as “lifting the high-water mark of its leaves” (19), and John Hoel believes that it has a plan, demonstrating the tree’s determination to live on. This is exemplified in the quote, “NEWS OF THE BLIGHT doesn’t reach western Iowa. The Hoel Chestnut keeps lifting the high-water mark of its leaves. It’s after something, the farmer thinks, his lone venture into philosophy. It has a plan” (19). However, as time passes, the tree begins to rot. From a conversation between Oliva and Nick, it is revealed that the Hoel tree suffers from blight invasion, as depicted in the quote “She touches the spongy trunk. Oh, shit. What is this? Death, unfortunately. They back away from the dying god” (170). The author demonstrates the devastating impact of human intervention on nature as exemplified by the statement “it wants solutions to problems that nothing alive yet knows how to solve, and it’s willing to use even death to find them” (Meinen and Herforth 48).

The loss of the American chestnut tree, as depicted in the novel, serves as a symbol of the fragility of nature when it is subjected to human intervention. Powers employs the image of human destruction through the novel’s exploration of the devastating impact of human actions on the environment such as Humboldt company policies of clear-cutting. Powers illuminates this issue, stating, “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” (20). This passage reveals how loggers, spurred on by the nascent Forest Service, hurriedly clear lands, leaving behind stumps that become breeding grounds for the blight. Facing various challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, human activities, and pollution, nature has consistently demonstrated an ability to regenerate and evolve as it can be seen from Bauman’s description of Earth’s self-regulation: “Gaia, is homeostatically regulated through biological negative feedback reactions and creates conditions that are self-sustaining and comfortable for life itself” (Bauman 1). Hence, despite the blight pandemic that destroyed the majority of the American chestnut trees, the Hoel chestnut managed to survive and flourish. Its ability to adapt and survive has enabled it to persist even in the face of the challenges caused by human intervention. However, when humans intervene without regard for the balance of nature, they can disrupt the natural order and cause irrevocable harm to the environment as noted “Since humanity became the king of the jungle, they have been altering the balance of the environment in such a tremendous way that the collateral damage of the change pushes the earth into an irreparable condition and consequently” (Uzun 365).

In the novel, trees symbolize both the passage of time and the depth of history, embodying a temporal scale that is at once slow and expansive. Nguyen remarks on this portrayal, noting, “Tree time is both so slow it is imperceptible and so massive it is difficult to imagine. Powers seems to be aware of these problems and *The Overstory* provides good examples of how they can be overcome” (Nguyen 34). In other words, Powers elevates trees beyond mere aesthetic objects, presenting them as sentient beings that have endured and adapted through centuries. In a conversation with Bradford Morrow, Powers emphasizes this perspective: “And once you begin to see trees—really see them as creatures with agency and intention and the capacity to communicate—they become characters in their own right. My goal, in *The Overstory*, was to treat trees as persons in their own dramatic narrative” (Powers 1). Trees thus emerge as silent witnesses to Earth’s history, highlighting the critical need to safeguard the natural world. Powers criticizes the human-centric view of nature, particularly trees, by highlighting the disconnect between human time scales and those of the natural world. He articulates this through the stark observation, “Life will cook; the seas will rise. The planet’s lungs will be ripped out. And the law will let this happen, because harm was

never imminent enough. Imminent, at the speed of people, is too late. The law must judge imminent at the speed of trees” (*The Overstory* 325). While trees operate on their own time scales, humans often interpret their existence solely through an anthropocentric lens, focusing on immediate human interests and ignoring broader ecological consequences. Powers argues for a legal and ethical reconsideration that adopts the slower, more deliberate pace of natural processes. He suggests that environmental protection laws should align with the temporal realities of trees and nature, acknowledging that by the time harm is recognized as “imminent” by human standards, it could be irreversibly late for ecological systems. His statement extends to a broader condemnation of a system that places capitalist priorities above the inherent value of natural regeneration and sustainability. To illustrate, in an interview with the *Guardian*, Powers challenges the conventional perspective on environmentalism, asserting, “Environmentalism is still under the umbrella of a kind of humanism: we say we should manage our resources better. What I was taking seriously for the first time in this book was: they’re not our resources; and we won’t be well until we realize that” (1).

## 1.2 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONNECTION TO NATURE

Powers' examination is further explored through the character Patricia, who presents a perspective on nature's inherent values: “A forest knows things. They wire themselves up underground. There are brains down there, ones our own brains aren’t shaped to see. Root plasticity, solving problems and making decisions. Fungal synapses” (294), which encapsulates an understanding of nature’s complexities, suggesting that a genuine appreciation and understanding of the natural world could harmonize human needs with environmental sustainability. In an interview highlighted by Emma John, Powers’ novel is celebrated for its depiction of trees’ complex lives, illustrating how they support each other and countless other organisms. John notes, “With scientific precision, Powers’s new novel portrays the interconnected lives trees lead. Their behavior - the ways they help and provide for each other, and other living things too numerous to count - is a direct rebuke to the way we live today” (1). Characters like Oliva and Patricia, through their journeys in the novel, begin to grasp their roles within the broader environmental network, recognizing the far-reaching impact of human activities not just on themselves



but on the whole ecosystem. Patricia's insight, "A forest knows things" (291), highlights the interplay within forest ecosystems and the implications of human interference. By weaving together narratives of various characters, each exploring different facets of human-tree relationships, Powers criticizes a capitalist ethos that places profit above the planet's health. His critique is not just about environmental degradation but also about a failure to acknowledge the emotional and ecological value of trees. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Powers discusses modern society's "complete alienation from everything else alive," which he identifies as a source of "mental despair," "terror," and "incapacity" (1). His commentary aligns with the principles of ecopsychology, which asserts that environmental problems should be addressed as psychological issues. The perspective recognizes that ecologically destructive behavior and various forms of individual and social suffering are intertwined, necessitating a holistic approach to healing both the mind and the environment.

Patricia Westerford as a dendrologist, deals with the impact of human activity on the environment because she is a highly regarded scientist, who dedicates her life to studying trees and their communication with one another. The narrator describes Patricia as "She's the first creature in the expanding adventure of life who has ever glimpsed this small but certain thing that evolution is up to. Life is talking to itself, and she has listened in" (133). Thus, Westerford exemplifies the principles of ecopsychology through her relationship with trees and her understanding of the all living beings. Patricia Westerford's deep connection to nature and trees, shaped by her upbringing, is central to her character and scientific endeavors. In "Roots," Powers reveals how Patricia's childhood fascination with stories of people transforming into trees, such as Daphne becoming a bay laurel to escape Apollo, mirrors her own bond with the natural world (125). Raised in the Pacific Northwest, her father's influence is visible, teaching her to observe and respect the forest's intricate ecosystems. He is described as her foundational element, guiding her to understand trees at a cellular level and fostering her reverence for nature's complexity: "Her father is her water, air, earth, and sun. He drives them to a copse of spared hardwoods in the bottoms of a slow stream" (123).

Patricia's passion for the natural world drives her to explore the untapped secrets of trees, and her discoveries prompt her to view nature not from an anthropocentric perspective but as a living and symbiotic entity within the larger ecosystem. Through her experiments, depicted as "taping numbered plastic bags over the ends of branches, then collecting them at measured intervals" (130), she realizes that trees communicate with each other through their roots, which facilitates the sharing of vital information, including resources and danger signals as Powers writes, "They're linked together in an airborne network, sharing an immune system across acres of woodland. These brainless, stationary trunks are protecting each other" (133). The knowledge Patricia gains about the way trees communicate confirms and shapes her understanding of the natural world. Her discovery that trees communicate via their roots demonstrates how her comprehension of the natural world has progressed from a basic appreciation of individual trees to an appreciation of the intricate network of interactions that exist between them which highlights the concept that trees are not isolated species but rather part of a wider ecosystem, and that their existence and well-being are dependent on their capacity to communicate and collaborate.

Patricia's exploration into the secret lives of trees draws inspiration from Peter Wohlleben's influential work, *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2015) which parallels her own fictional publication, *The Secret Forest* (Rich 1). Her research uncovers the "wood wide web" (Meinen and Herforth 43), an underground network where trees share nutrients and information, showcasing the communal aspects of forest ecosystems. Through *The Secret Forest*, Patricia blends scientific insight with narrative flair, illustrating how trees communicate via roots and collaborate for ecosystem health. Her novel reshapes the environmental perspectives of characters like Nick and Olivia, who discover new layers of meaning upon rereading Patricia's book. They marvel at the detailed portrayal of trees' sensory and communicative abilities, from discerning when to grow branches to locating water sources (*The Overstory* 223). Patricia's examples presents the resilience and adaptability of trees, honed over millennia to flourish in diverse settings. Moreover, she delves into trees' symbiotic relationships with other species, emphasizing the intricate network of interdependence within forests. Similarly, Neelay

is amazed by the book and holds it up “like it’s divine dictation” (276). His response indicates that the book has an effect on him, motivating him to observe the natural world with a fresh feeling of awe and respect. Dorothy and Ray are two other characters impacted by the novel. Dorothy finds it at the public library and brings it home for a read-aloud, but is unable to get past the first paragraph without being moved by its beauty and insight (289). The characters’ engagement with Patricia’s book highlights her impact as a nature writer, illustrating her ability to educate and inspire readers about the natural world’s marvels while advocating for environmental stewardship. Her approachable and empathetic writing demystifies complex scientific concepts, appealing to a broad audience. Scott Slovic’s observation that “Many literary naturalists imitate the notebooks of scientific naturalists, or the logbooks of explorers, or even the journals of non-scientific travelers to entrench themselves in the specific moment of experience” (4) shows the role writers like Patricia play in deepening public appreciation for nature.

Patricia’s groundbreaking insights into tree communication are met with skepticism and ridicule by a scientific community characterized by individualism and competitiveness. She is humiliated as “There are women who think trees are intelligent” (134), underscoring the gender bias and the narrow-mindedness Patricia faces. Unable to accept the humiliation she has been exposed to, Patricia decides to commit suicide. With the poisonous mushroom named “*Amanita bisporigera*” she collects from the forest, “She cooks up a Sunday feast for one” (135). When Patricia’s suicide attempt is analyzed with an ecopsychological approach, the following can be said: one way to connect her suicide to ecopsychology is through the concept of eco-anxiety. Kurth and Pikhala explain eco-anxiety as follows:

First, the idea that eco-anxiety brings responsiveness to environmental threats makes predictions that are supported by research in psychology. More specifically, if eco-anxiety accentuates one’s sensitivity and responsiveness to uncertainty about how best to respond to environmental threats, then there should be a positive correlation between uncertainty about environmental matters and feelings of eco-anxiety. Similarly, there should also be a positive correlation between one’s uncertainty about environmental matters and one’s motivation to engage in environmentally-oriented risk assessment and risk minimization efforts. (6)

Likewise, Patricia has seen the devastation of trees and the detrimental impact of human activity on the biosphere as a scientist. Combined with her love for trees and nature and

a sense of responsibility towards the planet, what she has faced has led to a sense of hopelessness and a feeling of being overwhelmed as presented by the author “Neither her friends nor family nor former colleagues will think anything but this: she was wrong in her controversial research, and wrong in her choice of fungal fruiting bodies for her dinner” (*The Overstory* 135). In this regard, her suicide may be a manifestation of her deep connection to the natural world and her despair at the destruction of the environment.

In her moment of crisis, “Something stops her. Signals flood her muscles, finer than any words. Not this. Come with. Fear nothing. Everything turns, as she watches, into a fit of madness, lifted” (135). The “not this” suggests Patricia rejects a harmful mindset, pivoting towards an alternative, possibly embodying a criticism of individualism and materialism. “Come with” and “fear nothing” hint at an invitation to embrace a deeper connection with nature, aligning with ecopsychology’s principles. The transformation she observes, “into a fit of madness, lifted,” indicates a shift in how Patricia perceives the world, symbolizing either the unpredictability of nature or her internal struggle to adopt a more eco-conscious existence. In the wake of this professional humiliation, Patricia turns to nature for solace and healing. Powers captures her retreat into the forest as a sanctuary from her torment: “Only the woods protect her from undying shame” (135). “She tramps the winter trails, feeling the thick, sticky horse chestnut buds with her frozen fingers. But all she can hear is the deafening of wisdom crowds,” (135) highlights ecopsychology's findings on nature's beneficial effects on well-being. For instance, participants in the actual nature condition reported being better able to tie up a loose end than those in urban or virtual settings, highlighting the importance of real nature for dealing with life problems (Mayer et al. 615). Additionally, research shows that exposure to nature leads to increased connectedness to nature, positive affect, and ability to reflect, while also reducing public self-awareness (623). *Study 1* provides strong support for state CNS as a mediator of nature’s effects on well-being, offering the first full mediational analysis of the relationship between exposure to nature and positive mood (619). These findings support Patricia's transformative experience, demonstrating the impact of connecting with nature on one's psychological state and reflective capacities.

Patricia embraces solitude and documents her observations of nature in notebooks, similar to historic nature writers like Thoreau. Scott Slovic notes that Thoreau's notebooks were a "storehouse of spontaneous comments about the aims and methods of science" and demonstrated his "approach to nature and his use of writing as a way to fathom his place in the universe" (34). Similarly, Patricia's diligent note-taking and sketching become her way of connecting with the natural world, her "only persistent possessions aside from clothes" (*The Overstory* 136), suggesting an engagement with nature as a source of healing and understanding. Her retreat to nature post-attempt and her subsequent observations reflect the ecopsychological principle of nurturing a reciprocal relationship with the environment, as Biswas states, "The result has always been suffering for both the environment and people as well, when the human beings and nature become detached or dissociated with each other" (93). Additionally, Patricia's encounter with Thoreau's query, "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly the leaves and vegetable mould myself?" (*The Overstory* 136), resonates with ecopsychology's ethos. Dr. Rakheebrita Biswas outlines that "Human beings and nature have a deeply bonded relationship as they are dependent on each other keenly" (93). Both Thoreau's reflections and ecopsychology advocate for a deeper connection with nature, emphasizing that "Ecopsychology helps in a dedicated examination and better understanding of the emotional bonding that exists between the human being and environment which is beneficial to both of them" (Biswas 96). This belief in the interconnection of human and environmental health is embodied through Patricia's experiences.

Patricia's journey through depression finds a moment of relief amidst the aspen groves of Utah, where the natural world offers her a sense of healing. Powers describes this transformative experience: "She stands inside this white-gray room, a pillared foyer to the afterlife. The air shivers in gold. Patricia Westerford hugs herself, and, for no reason, begins to cry" (137). The moment encapsulates her emotional release, offering solace and a connection to something greater than herself. The aspen trees, known for their trembling leaves that can quake without wind and their unique translucency ("Quaking Aspen" 2), create a spectacle, especially in autumn when their leaves change

color. The natural phenomenon evokes a deep emotional response in Patricia, whose tears reflect a release, a moment of being touched by the beauty and tranquility of nature. Patricia's connection with the aspen grove exemplifies ecopsychology in action, serving as a therapeutic encounter since "Ecopsychology is a therapeutic technique and ideology that tries to treat people psychologically by bringing them spiritually close to nature as much as possible, which in another way promotes the concept of sustainable development" (Biswas 94). Her connection not only aids her recovery but also redefines her identity, emphasizing her part in a larger web of life.

The novel reflects on the ineffable complexity of life, suggesting that "Life will not answer to reason. Patricia means to hear [the world's] massed symphonic choruses before she dies" (139), highlighting an urgency to understand and embrace the intricate connections within nature. Her scientific endeavors deepen her bond with trees, transforming this relationship into a source of healing post-trauma, declaring, "My life's work is listening to trees!" (217). Her yearning for a deeper understanding reflects an urgent need to appreciate and strengthen the bond between humans and nature. Patricia's desire to "hear before she dies" presents a commitment to exploring and cherishing the connection, suggesting a quest for meaning that transcends conventional wisdom and seeks to grasp the intricate web of life that unites all living beings and natural phenomena. Patricia's dedication to preserving forests, illustrated through her opposition to logging on sensitive federal lands, showcases her biocentric worldview and assessment of anthropocentrism. As an expert witness in Portland, she aims to highlight the ecological impact of logging, illustrating the importance of forests beyond human utility. Patricia emphasizes the broader ecological roles of forests, mentioning not just trees but the myriad of life they support: "Birds, mammals, and other plants. Tens of thousands of invertebrates. Three-quarters of the region's amphibians need them. A dead tree is an infinite hotel" (218). Her perspective presents the value of dead trees and the forest's intrinsic ecological functions, arguing against viewing trees solely for their economic benefits. Her perspective aligns with ecopsychology which posits that recognizing the psychological interdependence with nature can lead to more sustainable behaviors and help bridge the gap between pro-environmental attitudes and actions. As highlighted by Amel, Manning, and Scott, "awareness of our

interdependence with nature may also help us behave more sustainably” (14), showing Patricia’s call for action to mitigate human-induced environmental damage. Her observations and the emotional turmoil they provoke exemplify the ecopsychological emphasis on developing ecological responsibility and promoting practices that ensure the preservation of ecosystems for the well-being of future generations.

Patricia’s initiative to create a seed vault for endangered tree species reflects her commitment to addressing deforestation and habitat destruction. She sees this project as crucial for preserving biodiversity, likening the loss of tree species to the destruction of invaluable human resources: “Like burning down the library, art museum, pharmacy, and hall of records, all at once” (228). Despite her efforts, the realization that this alone cannot solve the deeper ecological issues contributes to her despair, as evidenced by her dramatic “un suicide” talk at the Stanford conference (300). Powers interprets Patricia’s “un suicide” as a radical call to action against the self-destructive tendencies of society, advocating for a reconnection with and reconciliation to the natural world by saying

Her lecture-demonstration on one very plausible answer — *kill yourself* — takes a turn toward a startling gesture, a toast to *un suicide*. That is the gesture behind the entire novel: the active, even violent effort to oppose a way of life that would gladly bring itself and all else down with it, rather than capitulate to even the mildest forms of reconciliation to the rest of the living world. (“Here’s to Un suicide: An Interview with Richard Powers”)

Powers suggests that the despair caused by capitalism and a disconnection from the rest of the living world is driving people towards a collective suicide and that the gesture of un suicide is about actively opposing this destructive way of life. Patricia’s criticism of the ongoing environmental crises, such as the decline of various tree species due to pests, acid rain, and climate change-induced fires, underlines her emotional burden and eco-anxiety. The sense of loss and despair over the environmental damage caused by human activities encapsulates the emotional and psychological challenges faced by those deeply connected to the natural world. Her actions and insights serve as a reminder of the urgent need for a collective shift towards more sustainable and ecologically integrated lifestyles.

Olivia Vandergriff’s character transformation from a carefree college student,

preoccupied with transient pleasures, to a person deeply connected to nature, illustrates a narrative on the impact of nature on human attitudes and behaviors. Initially described as reckless and disconnected, “The plan is simply to be a semi-bad girl. Then she’ll straighten up” (157), Olivia’s life is marked by her indulgence in sex, drugs, and all-night parties, highlighting a detachment not only from her studies but also from the natural world. However, a dramatic turn occurs when Olivia electrocutes herself, an event that drastically alters her perception and relationship with the world around her. This brush with death transforms Olivia, imbuing her with a newfound awareness and a guardian-like presence, as if “he’s the child now and she the guardian” (162). The shift in Olivia’s character signifies the awakening of her environmental consciousness, leading her towards a path of environmental activism. Her story underlines the theme that close encounters with nature—or in Olivia’s case, a life-altering experience—can lead to a significant shift in personal values and a reevaluation of one’s relationship with the environment. Through Olivia, Powers explores the idea that transformative experiences can lead individuals to become more attuned to environmental issues and more committed to conservation efforts.

Initially, Olivia’s environmental sensibilities are hinted at through a childhood anecdote involving her father’s legal defense of a transnational company against a farmer who reused soybean crops. Her indignation at the idea that one could own a living thing—“It is not possible to own the rights to a living thing” (164)—suggests an early alignment with nature’s intrinsic value, clashing with her father’s capitalist viewpoint that “protecting intellectual property creates wealth” (164). Her background sets the stage for Olivia’s transformation following her near-death experience. Despite a growing detachment from nature in her early adulthood, the accident reawakens her to the natural world’s significance, introducing her to “beings of light” (164) and catalyzing her mission to save the trees. Unlike her peers—Neelay, Patricia, and Nicholas—Olivia’s backstory and her relationship with nature are not deeply rooted in family influence or childhood experiences. Instead, her turning point comes later in life, highlighting that connections to the environment can emerge unexpectedly and reshape one’s priorities and actions, which reinforces the idea that environmental consciousness can evolve from personal experiences and revelations.



Her shift from indifference to passionate environmental advocacy exemplifies the transformative potential inherent in rediscovering human bond with the natural world, urging a move away from anthropocentric views towards a more harmonious coexistence with nature. In this regard, her experiences can be analyzed as an example of how spirituality and nature are intertwined, which has been explored in recent literature by psychologists such as Snell, Simmonds, and Webster, who highlight the spiritual dimension of connectedness to nature within the framework of ecopsychology. The authors suggest that drawing from Theodore Roszak's emphasis on spiritual experience of nature, as discussed in his seminal text *The Voice of the Earth* (1992), can help to elucidate the unique contribution of ecopsychology and its sustained relevance for environmentally focused psychologies. The article provides a comprehensive review of Roszak's literature, focusing on the theme of spirituality (48), and concludes that his emphasis on a spiritual or animistic experience of nature may assist in providing meaningful focus to contemporary ecopsychology (52). Likewise, Manolescu argues

While the biographic sections devoted to the various characters in "Roots" borrow from the tradition of literary realism, it would be misleading to read them exclusively through the lens of realism. The novel embraces a hybrid mode that blends life narratives with surges of poetic or aphoristic language that translate the language of trees or that describe ecstatic and life-changing experiences granted to certain characters in their communication with trees (Olivia Vandergriff in particular). Such characters and situations, placed on the borderline between the visible and the invisible, occupy a spiritual, mystical or empathetic space of discourse and action. (2)

In this regard, Olivia's connection with nature, especially following her encounter with the "beings of light," embodies the intertwining of spirituality and ecopsychology, challenging traditional anthropocentric views. As noted by Manolescu "Powers takes hold of this specific strand of Emerson's reflection and turns it into a foundation for his novel" (8). This divergence from Emerson's belief that nature is primarily a resource for human spiritual enlightenment to a more reciprocal relationship highlights a fundamental shift.

In more recent publications, authors such as Frances Marie Reilly and John V. Davis have emphasized spirituality as an integral component of ecopsychology. According to

Reilly,

Ecopsychology and transpersonal psychology suggest that our sense of being separate individuals is incomplete, and a shift to a broader ecological self is needed, which is both perceptual and spiritual (Winter, as cited by Davis 139). Indigenous cultures inherently recognize this spiritual connection, understanding that the health of people and the environment are interdependent. This perspective has resurfaced as the concept of the ecological self, emphasizing interconnectedness and fostering care for both humans and the natural world. (8-9)

Likewise, Davis explains the connection between ecopsychology and spirituality by saying that ecopsychology is deeply intertwined with spirituality, emphasizing that recognizing the correlation between people and natural environment can lead to both psychological healing and sustainable environmental action. He highlights that transpersonal experiences in nature often involve a shift in consciousness that fosters a deeper sense of unity and spiritual awareness, essential for both personal well-being and ecological responsibility (139). Both Gestalt and Transpersonal psychology, and their contemporary iterations of ecopsychology and transpersonal ecology, suggest that people's conventional understanding of themselves as autonomous beings is incomplete and require a shift in consciousness towards a wider and deeper ecological self, which is both a perceptual and spirituality (Winter 229). Ecopsychology recognizes the importance of spiritual experiences and their role in fostering a deeper connection with nature as Olivia's encounter with the beings of light inspires a heightened reverence for nature and a dedication to conservation, as evidenced by her acceptance of their message: "The most wondrous things alive need you" (*The Overstory* 168). Her spiritual connection to trees affects not only her understanding of nature but also her language as claimed by Manolescu, "Spiritual vocabulary permeates Olivia Vandergriff's discourse: trees are beings of light, presences, oracles, 'the most wondrous things alive'" (11).

Olivia, initially distant from nature and indulging in reckless behaviors, undergoes a transformation following a near-death experience. After being revived, she is visited by "the beings of light" who convey a pivotal message, leading her to abandon her previous lifestyle: "They showed her something, pleading with her. But the moment she came back to life, everything vanished" (162). Motivated by these visions, Olivia discards her drugs and exits school, driven westward by a newfound purpose: "They've

returned, beckoning. She will do whatever they ask” (162). Manolescu interprets this shift as Olivia developing “a particular sensitivity to vegetal language and to obey the injunctions of trees that only she can hear” (11). Her conviction deepens upon witnessing activists defending redwoods on TV, with the beings of light affirming her path: “This, this, this” (165), which marks the beginning of Olivia’s unwavering commitment to environmental activism, specifically the protection of old-growth forests. Captivated by the majestic redwoods that “beckoned to her,” Olivia realizes the critical need to safeguard the natural world’s splendor (196). Her resolve to defend ancient redwoods from logging epitomizes the deep bond between humans and nature, emphasizing the pressing imperative to conserve it. Powers highlights Olivia’s transformative experience when she encounters “FREE TREE ART,” leading to a spiritual awakening and a newfound appreciation for nature’s beauty. She marvels at a gigantic tree, envisioning it as “a tree so big it could fill an entire car of that lumber death train back in Indiana” (168), and is enchanted by a winter glade that seems like “an opening in the side of this frozen, forgetting Earth onto a hidden summer” (168). These moments awaken Olivia to the natural world’s wonders, fueling her activism. Her story illustrates the vital role spirituality plays in fostering a deep connection with nature and building a sense of community focused on environmental preservation.

Olivia’s journey and her bond with nature are deeply enriched by her connection with Nick Hoel who shares her reverence for the natural world and dedication to preserving the old-growth redwoods. Their commitment to nature’s sanctity are highlighted as the novel explores the intricate relationship between trees, spirituality, and ecosystems, acknowledging trees as “an essential source of life and a locus of spirituality” (Manolescu 9). Olivia’s encounter with the “lights of being” that guide her to Nick exemplifies this connection: “The lights of being come again until they’re beating against her eyes. She pulls over” (233). In their relationship, Olivia and Nick find a sense of belonging and purpose rooted in their shared connection to the natural world. His acceptance of Olivia’s experiences and his own artistic pursuit of capturing the essence of his dying tree reveal a deep acknowledgment of life’s mysteries and the importance of listening to nature’s subtle messages. His work with “magical trinkets” and “secret signal” (171) reflect a belief in the unseen forces that guide their paths,

emphasizing the novel's exploration of spirituality.

Understanding of nature shapes her perspective on environmental issues and her activism in the Redwood Protest. As explained by Kathryn Cope, the 1990 Redwood summer protest in California aimed to stop the logging of old-growth redwood trees (5). Sowards explains, local environmentalists and Earth First! activists launched a statewide campaign for a ballot initiative, known as Forests Forever, to sustain both forests and the logging industry. However, it failed to pass, garnering only 48% of the vote (6). Despite this setback, activists and policymakers transformed the North Coast in the subsequent decade (6). The protesters' activism was driven by their love for nature and the belief that trees are living beings with intrinsic value, not just a resource to be exploited. According to Cope, Powers portrays in *The Overstory*, the historical reference to the Redwood Protest is not just about the protest itself. For example, Mother N, who led the protest and advocated nonviolence, was named after Judi Bari, the founder of Earth First! The death of Mother N in the novel, falsely accused of eco-terrorism, was inspired by Bari's bombing and false accusations by the FBI (5). The novel also draws an analogy between the fictional Humboldt Company and Maxxam Inc., whose takeover replaced sustainability with clearcutting for a quick profit (5).

During the environmental protests, Olivia's evolving understanding of the natural world shapes her views on conservation. Her shift in perspective is highlighted during her and Nick's endeavor to save the Mimas tree from logging. Richard Powers personifies Mimas, suggesting that the tree possesses its own temperament, purpose, and values, and significantly interacts with characters like Nick and Olivia to influence the story's direction: "Mimas is certainly a character. They interact with the book's other main characters, especially Nick and Olivia" (Powers 1). Mimas symbolizes the natural world's interconnectedness and complexity, described as "an exercise in cladistics, the Evolutionary Tree of Life" (*The Overstory* 208). Olivia's bond with Mimas strengthens her resolve to preserve nature. She regards trees as sentient beings capable of communication and meaningful interactions with humans: "She speaks the creature's name like it's an old friend" (209). This perception guides her approach to environmental activism, heightening her awareness of the negative impacts of

deforestation, such as soil degradation and loss of wildlife habitat. Her description of the destructive logging practices, “It murders the soil” (340), reflects her deep connection to the earth and points out her commitment to advocating for the protection and respect of trees and their ecosystems.

Olivia’s connection to nature has not only shaped her perception of environmental issues but also affected her contributions to the movement. In her struggle to protect the trees, she becomes an active participant in the Redwood protests. Olivia engages in non-violent forms of protest that aim to appeal to a broader audience, including the utilization of performative arts. An instance of this is demonstrated when Nick paints the faces of the participants to resemble those of endangered animals, as illustrated in the novel, “a herd of wild animals. Antlers, whiskers, tusks, and flapping ears, elaborate masks on the heads of kids in hoodies and bomber jackets. The creatures die, fall to the pavement, and rise again, as if in some Sierra Club snuff film” (263). Her belief that humans must change their relationship with nature shapes Olivia’s environmental activism, as reflected in her idea, “We don’t put trees above people. People and trees are in this together” (244). By emphasizing the unity between nature and people, she presents one argument of ecopsychology which promotes people’s psychological well-being and is linked to the health of the environment which supports Roszak’s claim that “rights of the person” equals to “rights of the planet” (320). Olivia believes that “If people knew what went into making trees, they would be so, so thankful for the sacrifice. And thankful people don’t need as much” (245). Furthermore, she argues that “We need to stop being visitors here. We need to live where we live, to become indigenous again” (244). By adopting a biocentric perspective, Olivia sees the destruction of nature as a symptom of a deeper problem, a disconnection from the natural world. Through reconnection, humans can learn to appreciate and protect nature. Also, Olivia promotes the preservation of nature not just for the benefit of the environment but also to advance psychological well-being among people. Her perspective is further shaped by her conviction that humans should stop treating the Earth as a temporary home, but instead view it as their permanent habitat.

Olivia’s call to “stop being visitors here” and to “become indigenous again” reflects a

belief rooted in ecopsychology, which emphasizes “validating the synergistic importance of human–nature relationships and contributing to environmental conservation or sustainability” (Doherty 3), Olivia’s activism, therefore, is not only motivated by a desire to protect the environment, but also by a recognition of the psychological benefits of reconnecting with nature and living in harmony with it as claimed by her “[e]xponential growth inside a finite system leads to collapse. But people don’t see it. So the authority of people is bankrupt” (236). Olivia’s fear of trees killing people, as put by the author “We know these forests. We respect these trees. These trees have killed our friends. Maidenhair holds still. The idea of a tree-killing a person is too much for her to think about,” (221) presents the complicated unity between humans and nature. Olivia’s other explanations show that her fear of trees killing people also points to the need to respect and preserve nature, rather than simply fearing it as “The most wondrous products of four billion years of life need help” (165). In this interpretation, although people’s relationship with nature has dimensions, it is mutual and it is necessary to keep this complex relationship healthy, both for a more sustainable future and for individuals with high well-being.

The intersection of ecopsychology and Olivia’s death from an explosion in “Trunk” sheds light on the intricate relationship between the natural environment and people. As previously discussed, Olivia believes that humans must change their relationship with nature by adopting a more ecocentric attitude to develop environmental activism. Despite her efforts to save the trees, Olivia ultimately joins Nick, Douglas, Mimi, and Adam in their arsonist activities, resulting in her death, as depicted in the passage, “Something in the words hits Olivia. She tries to raise her head. Nick gentles her down. ‘I’m,’ she says. Her eyes close again” (248). Olivia’s death can be a criticism by Powers. According to him, “When people ask this question of hope, they really secretly or unconsciously harbor this idea that technological solutions or activism will allow us to continue more or less the same kind of life that we’ve been leading, and without changing the idea of where values and meaning come from” (1). In other words, Powers reflects on a cultural shift is necessary for environmentalism. He suggests that hoping for a continuation of the current way of life is unrealistic and that a change in values and worldviews is required. Therefore, he argues that solving current environmental

problems and their impacts on both people and nature requires more than just technological solutions or activism. Instead, he suggests that people reassess their beliefs and notions about what is essential and develop a new way of living in harmony with the natural environment.

The group's act of arson raises the issue of eco-terrorism or environmental fighters. On the one side, justifiable reasons are offered by the environmentalist group in the novel, for the acts of arson and sabotage against the Humboldt company, which harms the environment, the workers who cut down the Mimas trees, and the police brutality, such as "IT'S A SINGLE ACT of desperation. But the need for justice is like ownership or love," (*The Overstory* 241) or "They'll send this one last message and be done" (247). Approaching the act of arson from this perspective reveals the purpose behind the activists' decision which is activism that seeks to challenge oppression and create public opinion by addressing the issues of inequality and injustice. On the other hand, the path taken by activists can be described as extreme and dangerous because it puts not only themselves but also innocent people at risk of harm. This is supported by the fact that their strategies include the use of explosives and fire that can cause significant damage and destruction. Oliva's death as a result of this explosion, or Mimi's description of herself by saying "She's multiple felons. A manslaughter. Domestic terrorist" (308) can be examples of the destructive impacts of their actions. Another example is Adam's identification and conviction years after the incident, as "Guilty of the destruction of private property. Guilty of violence against the public well-being. Guilty of manslaughter. Guilty, the jury of Adam Appich's peers concludes, of domestic terrorism" (301). Consequently, although the motivations and goals of the characters are based on protecting the environment and raising environmental awareness in people, the way they resort to achieving their goals raises questions about the effectiveness and ethics of using violence as a tool.

Douglas Pavlicek, known as Douglas-Fir in *The Overstory*, embarks on a life-long quest for meaning, navigating through significant experiences that shape his environmental activism. Initially introduced during the Stanford Prison Experiment, Douglas expresses his disillusionment with human cruelty and the futility of war, stating, "He doesn't want

to live in a world where some twenty-year-olds die so that other twenty-year-olds can study psychology” (86). This event, coupled with his survival in the Vietnam War thanks to a Banyan tree, reinforces his connection to trees and nature: “He owes his own life to a tree” (92). Post-war, Douglas’s journey into environmental consciousness intensifies upon observing the indiscriminate destruction of nature, leading to his realization about humanity’s shortsightedness and the collective impact of such actions on the environment. He critically reflects on human nature, believing that the species’ gravest error lies in conflating consensus with truth, influenced heavily by societal norms and pressures: “It’s Douggie’s growing conviction that the greatest flaw of the species is its overwhelming tendency to mistake agreement for truth” (92).

In relation to ecopsychology and its relevance to Douglas’s story, his connection to trees and nature impacts his mental and emotional well-being. Jayanthi and Maheshini note that Douglas recognizes the urgent need to stop deforestation and sees it as an extreme materialization of trees, which motivates him to take action (113). The concept of the ecological unconscious is also relevant to Douglas, as it emphasizes the importance of an emotional connection with the environment, which has diminished in modern urban-industrial societies (Olza and MacDonnell 105). Douglas feels a deep sense of connection and gratitude toward the Banyan tree. Moreover, Douglas’ environmental activism can be seen as an extension of the idea of an ecological self, which involves expanding one’s sense of identity to include a deeper connection and identification with the natural world. Edelglass explains the concept of the ecological self as a transformation in identity. The shift moves from a “separate and fragile” self that is focused on defense and acquisition to a more expansive sense of self that recognizes the interdependence of all beings in the natural world (430). The development of an ecological self leads to the growth of the ecological ego, which involves a sense of ethical obligation towards the environment that is as strongly felt as people’s ethical obligations towards others since “ [t]he symbolic persona of Gaia is said to be integrated into our own consciousness and emanates the voice of the Earth through our own ego identity, supporting the idea of an ecological ego that connects the consciousness of the entire species and inherently links us to the Earth” (Harrild and Luke 6). The concept of ecological ego aligns with Douglas’s evolving ecological



consciousness because Douglas begins to see the natural world as interrelated and begins to develop an ecological responsibility.

The concept of ecological unconscious proposed by Roszak states that humans have an innate connection to nature but this connection is often suppressed or ignored in modern society, which causes further societal and environmental issues (320). Douglas brings the suppressed ecological unconscious to the surface as he witnesses the clear-cuts and deforestation practices, the result of the disregard for the inherent connection between humans and nature, as proposed by Roszak's concept of the ecological unconscious. In other words, his experiences in nature awaken him to a deeper understanding of the world and his place in it. To illustrate, Douglas' experience as a Vietnam war veteran, having his life saved by a Banyan tree, has been attributed as the turning point in his outlook towards the environmental issues around him. As noted by the author, "The universe is a banyan, its roots above and branches below. Now and then words come trickling up the trunk for Douglas like he's still hanging upside down in the air: Tree saved your life. They neglect to tell him why" (Powers 92). The concept of interdependence with nature is a recurring theme in ecopsychology, as noted "As ecopsychology continues to take root and permeate cultural consciousness, it will enliven a natural sense of our collective responsibility toward each other, toward self, and toward the earth" (Bucci 6). Hence, Douglas' experience with the Banyan tree can be interpreted as an instance of the ecological unconscious in action, wherein the contents of the unconscious represent a living record of cosmic evolution. After that incident, Douglass fosters an ethical responsibility towards the environment by saying "He knows he's slinging trees for middlemen to the same fuckers who cut down the primordial gods, to begin with. But he doesn't have to vanquish the lumber industry or even get nature's revenge. He just needs to earn a living and undo the look of those cuts, a look that tunnels into him like a beetle into sapwood" (*The Overstory* 96). Douglass becomes aware of the destructive actions of the logging lumber industry and the destructive impact it has on the environment, and he feels a personal responsibility to make a difference in his way.

Douglas's increasing attunement to the natural world makes him more conscious of the destructive impact of human activities on the environment. One of his most significant experiences in this regard is when he witnesses "The Curtain of Concealing Trees," which represents the loss of vast swathes of forest. As the author puts it, "It's not just the hundreds of thousands of acres that have vanished on him from one morning to its adjacent afternoon" (95). His experience with the first sight of clear-cutting becomes a wake-up call for Douglas, highlighting the enormity of the environmental destruction that takes place. In response, he decides to take individual action to help the environment by planting apple trees to repair the damage caused by human activity. As the author describes his efforts to plant the trees, "He drags himself across the scattered crap on all fours, losing his footing in the impenetrable slash, hauling himself forward by his claws over the chaos of roots, sticks, branches, limbs, stumps, and trunks, fibrous and shredded, left to rot in a tangled graveyard" (96).

Feith explains that Douglas' sense of the destruction concealed behind visually undamaged woodlands serves as an illustration of Glenn Albrecht's concept of solastalgia which is "[t]he pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory" (Albrecht 17). Feith quotes, "Such powerful feelings are evoked through Douglas' discovery of the devastation behind the thin curtain of Potemkin forests" (115), referring to the distress caused by environmental destruction. In other words, Douglas' experience with the destructive side of human activities on the environment, as well as his efforts to plant trees and undo the damage, reflects an awakening of his ecological unconscious because through his experience, he becomes more attached to the natural world. Also, Douglas' involvement in the Redwood protests suggests that he is aware of his ecological unconscious because by protesting against the logging of ancient redwood forests, Douglas presents his recognition of the vitality of the conservation of the natural world. In his article, Strumse defines "the ecological self" as an expanded identity that encompasses "the larger collective of all living things" (14), moving beyond a singular, competitive ego to a broader identification with the entire biosphere. The broader sense of self emerges as individuals begin to see beyond their immediate social circles to include all humanity and, ultimately, all living beings (14-15).

Douglas's story exemplifies how a broader ecological identity can emerge through direct experiences with nature, leading to an understanding of one's role within the larger ecological system. Through his connection to trees and forests, Douglas comes to see himself not just as an individual but as part of a vast, living network. The shift in perspective is central to the development of the ecological self, highlighting the importance of considering the broader ecological impacts of human actions. Douglas's affinity for the woods is highlighted as an embodiment of ecopsychology. His comfort in the forest, "Old friends...He lets the trees comfort him" (*The Overstory* 176), presents nature's healing capacity and the critical role of preserving natural habitats for human well-being. Powers points out deforestation's adverse effects, using "condemned trees" (176) as symbols of environmental loss and the consequent impact on the human-nature bond. The narrative suggests that Douglas's unease stems from a disconnection with the natural world, exacerbated by urbanization and a societal inclination to place humans above nature.

Uzunoğlu defines ecological ego as "[t]he stable state of ego which gives mentally, emotionally and behaviourally no harm to nature, but also respectful to all creatures. Environmental problems are mainly derived from ill-relations of ego and environment" (33). The idea sets the stage for examining the dispute between Douglas and the loggers when economic motives clash with the imperative of environmental stewardship. The loggers justify their actions by saying, "We've been cutting these hillsides for decades, and we've been replanting. Ten trees for each one we cut" (211). Douglas counters this by highlighting the irreplaceable value of the old-growth trees compared to the young saplings: "Ten little paper pulp seedlings for each one of these varied, ancient geniuses" (211). The debate is framed within the ecological ego concept, contrasting the loggers' economically driven ego which views nature as a commodity, against Douglas' ego which is deeply aware of the intrinsic connection to and the need to safeguard nature for its own sake and for future generations. To clarify, the logger's ego is focused on economic gain and sees nature as a resource to be exploited, whereas Douglas' ego recognizes the need to protect the natural environment for its intrinsic value.

Powers portrays the clear-cutting of old-growth forests and the subsequent replanting of monoculture tree farms, which results in a loss of biodiversity and ecological complexity. The narrative portrays the logging industry's disregard for the long-term ecological consequences of its actions, driven by short-term profits and economic growth as a critique. The author asserts, "It's a funny thing about capitalism: money you lose by slowing down is always more important than the money you've already made" (201). Through the destruction of an ecological cycle, Powers aims to raise critical questions about humanity's relationship with the natural environment and the ethical implications of exploiting natural resources for economic gain. According to Ana Prundaru's review of *The Overstory*, trees are more than romanticized backdrops to human activities. In an effort to highlight their immeasurable contribution to the upkeep of ecosystems, trees are depicted in an active voice (1). The portrayal of trees challenges the traditional view of nature as a passive resource for human exploitation and invites readers to reconsider the complex and interdependent relationship between humans and the natural world. The novel delves into the impact of deforestation on Douglas' mental and emotional well-being. As he becomes more conscious of clear-cutting's aftermath, his mental state gradually worsens. The initial realization he goes through happens when he sees "The Curtain of Concealing Trees" (95). During his visit to Oregon, Douglass realizes that authorities have stripped non-roadside trees from inside the forest for aesthetic purposes only. He understands that the forest is "a pure prop" and "clever artistry" used to hide the destruction that has taken place (95). Therefore, his discovery serves as an example of how environmental destruction can affect one's perception of their surroundings.

Powers portrays the loss of natural resources as a result of human activities through Douglas' mental state. Specifically, the conversation between Douglas and the cashier highlights the destructive consequences of economic gain-driven deforestation. Douglas expresses his confusion and frustration over the clear-cutting of forests for economic gain as presented "It's not just the hundreds of thousands of acres that have vanished on him from one morning to its adjacent afternoon" (95). The destruction of nature affects people's mental and emotional well-being, especially those who have close ties to nature. As a character with a close relationship with nature, Douglas is emotionally

affected by the loss of trees, which leaves him feeling angry and betrayed as presented, “His little datum will last him for some days to come. Anger starts to boil over, somewhere before Bend” (97). The frustration and anger that Douglas feels reflect a sense of helplessness and loss of control over the natural world, leading to feelings of anxiety and depression. Douglas’s frustration and anger stem from his realization that the company he works for is also responsible for deforestation as clarified by the cashier “You’re thinking national parks. National forest’s job is to get the cutout cheap. To whoever’s buying” (96), adds another layer to the complexity of this issue as “But the deliberate, simpleminded, and sickeningly effective trick of that highway-lining curtain of trees makes him want to smack someone” (100), revealing the need for collective action to address the problem. Moreover, the emotional distress that Douglas experiences continues to affect him for several days, leaving him unable to cope with the devastation he has witnessed.

The author describes how Douglas is impacted by the mental turmoil he goes through for several days after seeing the destruction. He spends three days at his friend’s place, unable to communicate and feeling hopeless. The clear-cut he saw, which seemed to go on forever and left him feeling helpless, haunts him (96). Hence, it can be interpreted that he feels desperate because he cannot utilize his skills to make a positive difference in the face of the environmental crisis he has witnessed. Douglas’s attempt to combat environmental damage by replanting trees in areas affected by clear-cutting reflects his deep commitment to ecological restoration. Yet, he is disheartened by the realization that these efforts may be in vain: “they’re just gonna cut them right back down again, a couple more years” (174). His physical and mental health deteriorates as a result of his strenuous efforts, leaving him with severe exhaustion and a tremor, underscoring the personal toll of environmental activism: “Douglas is beyond pitiful. He has shot his nervous system, wrecked his bum leg” (174). The enduring image of the devastated forest not only serves as a reminder of the ecological destruction Douglas has witnessed but also emphasizes the psychological impact such destruction can have on individuals. Through Douglas’s experiences, Powers suggests the importance of preserving natural environments for both ecological health and human well-being. Echoing the principles of ecopsychology, the novel advocates for a reevaluation of the human-nature

relationship, aiming to heal both the planet and the human psyche by challenging the separation between humanity and the natural world:

The ultimate goal of ecopsychology is to bring healing to the human psyche and the planet by challenging, if not eliminating, the human/nature binary in individual and collective thought. In drawing attention to a client's relationship to the natural world, ecopsychologists prompt people to think deeply about this relationship and thus improve upon it as they would any other relationship in their life. (Balogh 88)

The narrative reinforces the idea that unsustainable exploitation of natural resources harms the environment and affects human mental health, emphasizing the necessity for sustainable practices and policies to mitigate these impacts.

To conclude, Richard Powers' *The Overstory* intricately explores the bond between humans and nature, positioning the natural world as a significant character that influences the novel's nine protagonists. The narrative advocates for the essential role nature plays in human survival and the integrity of the ecosystems, weaving together the lives of characters, their connections with trees, environmental activism, and frameworks of biophilia and ecopsychology. It inspects humanity's destructive exploitation of nature for economic gain and the ensuing natural disasters from this environmental degradation. Biophilia and ecopsychology are central to Powers' analysis of how society undermines nature's value, illustrated by the characters' diverse reactions to deforestation and its dire consequences.

According to Riem, most characters fail in their missions to save trees and forests because they approach their task with a human-centric mindset (37). Yet, Patricia's character introduces a hopeful perspective, suggesting nature's self-healing capabilities, despite her skepticism about human willingness to change. Patricia embodies hope, advocating for nature's resilience and self-restoration. Her involvement in the Vault project reflects her deep ecological understanding and belief in nature's healing powers. Conversely, Olivia's death by arson highlights the grave dangers faced by environmental activists. This event, alongside the imprisonment of Adam and Douglas and Neelay's early disability, emphasizes the emotional and psychological toll of environmental advocacy. These narratives suggest a collective struggle against a systemic issue threatening existence itself, presenting the need for a shift towards a

more sustainable interaction with the natural environment. *The Overstory* thus not only delves into personal struggles but also tackles broader environmental concerns, emphasizing the correlation of human and ecological well-being.

## CHAPTER 2

### HUMAN-NATURE CONNECTIONS: ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND BIOPHILIA IN *BEWILDERMENT*

*Bewilderment* (2021) is about Theodore Byrne and his son, Robin Byrne, who grapples with behavioral issues after his mother's death. Robin is a young child with ADHD, autism, and OCD. In an effort to help, Theo directs Robin to participate in an experimental treatment known as Decoded Neurofeedback (DecNef). As Robin's condition improves, he begins to take active role in advocating for environmental causes, including the protection of 2,000 North American species. Theodore observes positive changes in Robin's behavior as:

Our days seemed to improve, and not just because I looked for evidence. He stepped off the bus in the afternoons humming. One Saturday he even went out sledding with a group of neighborhood kids he barely knew. I could not remember the last time he left the house to be with anyone other than me. (122)

The story also features frequent camping trips to the Smoky Mountains, where Robin finds peace and comfort in nature. Robin's advocacy can be seen as an expression of his biophilia, as his love for nature and the environment drives his concerns. Powers' use of the DecNef methods also reflects a rising interest in using technology to foster a deeper connection with nature, aligning with ecopsychological principles. Furthermore, the narration is delivered from a first-person perspective through Theo, which makes it possible to observe Theo's thoughts and emotions as he manages the challenges of raising Robin. It also allows readers to see how Robin engages with nature and experiences improvement. Consequently, this chapter examines the relevance of Robin's biophilic inclinations and how ecopsychology helps him understand his perspective and experience of nature as Roszak explains, "Ecopsychology seeks to restore the sense of the sacred in nature and to heal the psychic wounds that come from being separated from the natural world" (3). Similarly, Wilson contends that "biophilia is the urge to affiliate with other forms of life" (84), rooted in the human evolutionary past. In *Bewilderment*, Robin's love for nature and his wish to protect it show his deep connection to the environment and how it affects him as he explains, "Everybody's broken" then "That's why we're breaking the whole planet. And pretending we aren't



like you just did” (215). Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates how *Bewilderment* depicts the connectivity of human psychology and the natural world and shows the importance of incorporating ecopsychology into human understanding of human-nature relationships.

## 2.1 A JOURNEY THROUGH AN ECOPSYCHOLOGICAL LENS

Robin suffers from a couple of mental problems as captured in the novel, where Robin’s struggle is described: “The full awfulness of life washed over him with his mother’s absence. He obsessively sought reassurance and dwelled on the past, endlessly questioning about his mother’s life, their shared memories, and the details of her past” (232), Robin’s experiences and behaviors indicate a probable as exemplified in a passage from the novel, where a conversation about Robin’s condition unfolds: “ ‘Has he been diagnosed with something?’ ’So far the votes are two Asperger’s one probable OCD and one possible ADHD’ ”(83). ADHD can be defined as “a disorder of childhood and adolescence characterized by a pattern of extreme pervasive, persistent and debilitating inattention, overactivity and impulsivity” (Hoseini et al. 444). In educational settings, Robin’s ADHD symptoms are evident in his inattention and difficulty in focusing, especially in environments that do not align with his interests. His daydreaming and struggles with deadlines described as “He daydreamed, had trouble with deadlines and yes, he refused to focus on things that didn’t interest him” (*Bewilderment* 9). On the other hand, Robin demonstrates a keen understanding and deep interest in topics that engage him, especially those concerning nature and the universe. His connection with nature is evident in his personal journal which is filled not with typical childhood musings, but rather with detailed sketches, notes, and thoughtful questions about the natural world (139). His observations reflect a level of appreciation and curiosity about nature, showcasing his connection to and understanding of it as shown “I love grass. It grows from the bottom, not the top. If something eats the tips, it doesn’t kill the plant. Only makes it grow faster. Pure genius!” (140). However, the strict and structured environment of conventional education conflicts with his natural approach to learning, resulting in his struggle with academic performance and feelings of frustration, which is evident in a moment from the book where Robin expresses his aspirations and educational needs, stating, “I want to be an ornithologist. They don’t teach you that in the fourth grade” (147).

His inattentiveness is not a lack of interest or intelligence but a reflection of a system ill-equipped to engage his deeply inquisitive mind. He further reflects on the purpose of schooling, pondering, “You want me to learn everything I need for being an adult. So school should teach me how to survive the world ten years from now” (147). In a traditional classroom, Robin’s tendency to daydream and focus intensely on subjects of interest to him is viewed as problematic. He often experiences intense emotional episodes, especially anger, which can be unexpectedly strong and not always in proportion to the triggering events. For example, the novel includes a telling example of this: Robin’s father describes a situation where Robin, unable to control his anger, ends up throwing “a thermos at a friend’s face” (83), which shows that Robin’s social interactions can be marked by challenges in understanding and responding to social cues. Robin’s struggle is compounded by disruptions in his routine, as pointed out by his father, “He missed a week of class. That’s five days in every academic subject. He needs continuity, focus, and social integration. He’s not getting that and that’s stressful for him” (64). His lack of stability in his educational environment adds to the stress he experiences, further influencing his reactions. Also, these impulsive reactions, with his struggle in managing and understanding his emotions, frequently lead to difficulties in social interactions, causing misunderstandings and conflicts both in his school environment and at home.

ASD can be defined as “neurodevelopmental disorder associated with the presence of social-communication deficits and restricted and repetitive behaviors” (Ousley and Cermak 20). Powers paints a picture of Robin as a uniquely curious child, burdened with a deep sense of the world’s complexities from a very young age, as he notes, “Our curious boy, as strange as anyone. Weighed down by the world’s history, before he even learned to talk” (16). Reflecting on his performance in school, Powers observes, “In a confidential report, his second-grade teacher had called him slow but not always accurate. She was right about the slow, wrong about the accurate” (17). Robin’s way of communicating is illustrated in a scene where, gazing into the flames, he speaks in a monotone voice that would raise concerns from a pediatrician, saying, “The good life, and after a pause, I feel like I belong here” (25). Robin’s way of processing the world is further exemplified by his repetitive behaviors, such as “He rehearsed memories

endlessly, and every repetition of the details made him happier. When he finished a book he liked, he'd start it again immediately, from page one" (9).

Beyond ADHD and ASD, Robin's emotional landscape is influenced by the grief of losing his mother, as evident in the observation that "the same mother whose death sent the boy into a downward spiral" (185). His emotional responses are intense as he struggles to process and cope with the loss. Powers portrays Robin's emotional outbursts and moments of despair as deeply human reactions to a world that feels overwhelming. The narrative suggests, "In the face of the world's basic brokenness, more empathy meant deeper suffering. The real question is not why Robin is struggling, but why the rest of us remain seemingly unaffected" (12). In this regard, Robin's responses are not just symptoms of a disorder, but rather natural and understandable reactions to the complexities and challenges of the world around him. Theo, aware of the challenges faced by his son Robin, adopts strategies shown by patience and understanding. He observes Robin's interactions, such as the scene where Robin, almost seven, is engrossed in a jigsaw puzzle with his mother Alyssa. Theo's external perspective reveals an insight: "I looked on from the outside unable to hear a note of the unfolding symphony. Robin's face ran the gamut of squints, scowls, and smirks. He seemed to be chattering with someone in a language that had only two native speakers" (153). Alyssa's strategy in this cooperative activity is similar to Theo's own; she purposely slows down the puzzle construction so that Robin can remain interested and feel the whole range of a child's joy. Their exchanges and collaborative endeavors show how involving Robin in pursuits that suit him, such as this easy puzzle beneath the brass elbow lamp, helps him feel secure and included. His understanding approach emphasizes how much Theo values providing a supportive atmosphere for Robin while also recognizing his distinct perspective on the world.

Theo advocates for his son's needs in educational settings, ensuring that Robin's learning environment accommodates his way of processing information. Theo questions the school's strategy after receiving an ultimatum from the principal to medicate Robin with psychotropic medicines when he says "The principal of my son's school was threatening to investigate me if I didn't put my third-grader on psychoactive drugs"

(65). His prioritization of communication with his son over complying with the principal's instructions is indicative of his drive to comprehend and facilitate Robin's distinct information processing style. Theo and Robin have a strong support system for each other. Ginny, a character in the story, expresses her feelings about Robin, saying, "He's contagious. A viral vector. We all feel happier when he's here" (153). The growth and presence of Robin, flourishing under the constant and compassionate support of Theo, cast a positive influence on their surroundings.

The novel also touches upon formal therapeutic interventions. Robin undergoes sessions with a school psychologist, Dr. Lipman, who attempts to understand his behavioral challenges. However, her methods are met with limited success, highlighting the complexity of Robin's condition and the need for more personalized approaches. Dr. Lipman is described as "enthralled by ed psych jargon" and someone who "saved herself for the troubled ones" (64), highlighting her commitment to her profession. Despite her dedication, her methods are not enough for Robin, whose unique needs require a more tailored approach. To illustrate, when Dr. Lipman confronts Theo, whom she perceives as a "pigheaded scientist," about an incident where Robin loudly demanded answers from his friend, screaming, "Tell me. Tell me, you freaking jerk-face" (64), she highlights the importance of "continuity, focus, and social integration" for Robin, stressing that his "unscheduled vacation" and repeated tardiness contribute to his stress (65). As the conversation continues, Theo reflects on his own reactions: "Anger makes me clam up. It's a deep-seated trait, one that has often saved me" (65). Dr. Lipman's "strange little lips moved, and stranger words came out," as she insisted, "You have another choice now. You can help your child by giving him the treatment that he needs, or we can get the state involved" (65). She even threatens, "We'll need to see some progress by December," implying potential state intervention if Robin's situation does not improve (65). Dr. Lipman's confrontation with Theo reveals the tension between professional protocols and the needs of Robin.

Theo and Robin's journey also leads them to explore experimental neurofeedback therapy. The therapy, aimed at enhancing emotional regulation and social skills, is encapsulated in a scene where Currier, the therapist, observes, "We're learning to

induce connectivity between the relevant regions of his brain. Neurons that fire together wire together” (97). The statement reflects the core objective of the therapy, which is to modify Robin’s cerebral functions. Nevertheless, the modification comes with its own set of challenges. Although, Robin’s transformation signals a significant shift in his inherent personality traits, such changes prompt a deeper reflection on the ethical dimensions of employing such therapies, especially considering their capacity to fundamentally alter an individual’s character. Robin’s journey through complex emotions leads him to discover a sense of belonging and peace in the natural environment, which becomes apparent during their getaway to the Smoky Mountains, where Robin’s engagement with the natural surroundings plays a crucial role in soothing his worries and moderating his moods. His transformation is encapsulated when he engages in “Wildlife bingo,” (11) his new favorite game, calling out excitedly at the sight of a tall bird or a gray fox. As he flips through his field guide by the rapids, signifies an aspect of his coping strategy. To clarify, it is not just about identifying animals; it is about finding a place where he feels at one with the world, exemplified when he exclaims, “Fox! Fox! I saw him, Dad!” (12) and learns about the gray fox’s unique habits. For him nature provides a therapeutic respite from the overwhelming stimuli of everyday life, as supported by Berto, exposure to restorative environments has been shown to facilitate recovery from such mental challenges (251). Robin’s struggle with his identity, particularly his name, reflects the burden of societal expectations and personal history. His name, chosen because the robin was a cherished bird for both Robin and his mother (133), became a point of contention and distress in his life. He expresses frustration and confusion about what it means to be Robin’ in various social settings like school and the park, and faces bullying because of it. His mother’s perspective, “The world is going to take this child apart” (17) foreshadows the challenges he endures in navigating a world that often seems incomprehensible and overwhelming to him.

Environmental degradation, an escalating global issue, has psychological implications, particularly for the younger generation. Robin, a child deeply attuned to nature, exemplifies the psychological impacts of environmental issues on young minds as explained “although predominantly caused by the current generation of adults, the worst

consequences will occur during the lifetimes of today's children and young people” (Sanson and Bellemo 205). His emotional responses to the degradation of nature, ranging from sadness to anger and withdrawal, mirror the broader impact of these environmental crises on mental health. His sensitivity to the environment’s plight reflects an empathy for all living things. His empathy, while a source of great compassion, also makes him susceptible to grief and anxiety in the face of environmental degradation since there is “the fact that climate change impacts mental health” (Tsevreni et al. 6). Robin displays a range of emotions, from awe and wonder to despair and anger, in response to environmental issues such as his passionate display of the environmental banner which “was covered in paints, markers, and inks of all colors. Down the length of it ran the words: LET’S HEAL WHAT WE HURT” (193), and his involvement in bird-watching. These emotions could stem from a deep-seated connection to nature and a keen awareness of the environmental changes occurring around him. For individuals like Robin, environmental crises are not distant, abstract problems; they are immediate and personal. For Robin, learning about the Mississippi River's degradation and its ecosystem is a personal and distressing experience. He states, “Like, more than half our migrating birds use the river, but they can’t because they’re losing their habitat” (166). Despite this, he believes in Earth's ability to renew itself, saying, “Don’t worry, Dad. We might not figure it out. But Earth will” (166).

As presented before the deterioration of the environment can lead to a decline in Robin's mental health. One of the primary emotional responses Robin exhibits is grief. The loss of biodiversity, the extinction of species, and the destruction of natural habitats can evoke a deep sense of mourning in those who feel closely connected to the natural world as explained:

A systematic review on climate-related non-economic losses has shown that people are subject to intangible harm from climate change (e.g., disappearance of fauna and flora, loss of cropland and living spaces for animals, loss of ways of life), loss of personal identity constructed in relation to the physical environment. Ecological grief is the emotional response to such losses. (Comtesse 2)

Since Robin witnesses the decline of the natural surroundings, he is akin to losing a part of himself, as evidenced when he learns that over two thousand North American species are threatened or endangered (71). The news distresses him, leading him to “toppled the

tower of books and sank his head in his hand” (71), signifying how his emotional well-being are linked to the state of the environment. Additionally, children in particular, may feel anxious about the future of the planet and their role in its preservation since “An initial search of the literature revealed that evidence on the topic of ecoanxiety focused on initial theories and many suggested specific recommendations in relation to children coping with climate change awareness” (Léger-Goodes et al. 3). Robin’s awareness of environmental issues, illustrated by his artwork as Theo depicts “There was an ivory-billed woodpecker and a red wolf and a Franklin’s bumblebee and a giant anole and a clump of desert yellowhead. Some were more skillful than others. But they all vibrated, and the colors shouted, Save us” (75), and his comment about the importance of insects in food production, contributes to a sense of urgency and concern about the future.

Eco-anxiety is often compounded by feelings of helplessness, as many children lack the means to effect significant change in environmental policies and practices. Hickman explains, “Many said that they felt like giving up trying to talk with their parents about it because it either led to arguments or to parents responding by either saying ‘you are worrying too much’ or saying ‘what do you think we should do about it’ which felt as if they were being asked to fix the crisis for the adults” (Hickman 419). For example, when one of Robin’s teachers reprimands him for selling his paintings to save endangered species, Robin narrates,

She gave me a demerit. She said it was against the rules to sell things on the school grounds, and I should have known that from the class handbook. I asked her if she knew that half the large animal species on the planet would be gone by the time we reached her age. She said we were on social science, not biology, and don’t talk back, or I’d get another demerit. (108)

The impact of environmental degradation on mental health can also manifest as anger and frustration. Robin’s reactions to witnessing the destruction of natural habitats, as evidenced by his distress over the pollution of rivers, include feelings of anger towards those responsible for these environmental harms. His concern about the effects of chemicals and drugs on river wildlife showcases his frustration at corporations, governments, and society for their neglect in protecting the environment. He reflects on the challenges people face in presenting these harsh realities to students without masking the truth by saying “The chemicals that farmers spray on their stuff goes in the

river, and that's turning the amphibians into mutants. And all the drugs that people pee and poop down the toilet. The fish are completely doped up. You can't even swim in it anymore!" (165).

In this regard, it can be said that the progression of Robin's experiences illustrates the influence that environmental factors have on mental health and psychological well-being. His narrative, which depicts a journey from confronting societal challenges and enduring personal sorrow to ultimately finding solitude in nature, demonstrates the restorative qualities inherent in the natural environment. As Robin moves away from the society that struggles to understand him, his immersion in the tranquility of nature offers a contrast to the earlier parts of his story. His mind's transformation becomes evident during a moment in the wilderness with his father. The tranquility of their surroundings, accentuated by the task of shaving "pine twigs for a fire" (225) and the anticipation of a meal cooked over an open fire, highlights Robin's newfound sense of peace. In this serene setting, Robin's expression of contentment, "The good life. I feel like I belong here," (25) echoes amidst the natural landscape, marking a departure from his previous experiences in a society that often left him feeling isolated and misunderstood. It is in the serenity of the Smoky Mountains where Robin finds peace that eludes him in the structured, human-made world since their "only responsibility in the whole world was to cook our beans and toast our marshmallows" (25). In this environment, Robin experiences a connection with the world around him. For example, cooking beans and toasting marshmallows by the fire (25), while seemingly mundane, becomes a moment of contentment for Robin.

Ecopsychology, as discussed in "Nature and Health," integrates with the notion of the natural versus artificial environment dichotomy. The study illuminates the reduced interaction with nature in urbanized settings and the ensuing health implications, which aligns with ecopsychology's tenet that a deep, intrinsic connection with nature is critical for psychological well-being, highlighting the contrast between the serene natural environment and the often stressful urban life (Harting et al. 2007). The perspective is further explored when considering the nuances of Robin's experiences through the lens of human health and environmental psychology. His interactions with nature, from the



excitement of wildlife bingo to the learning about the habits of a gray fox, are not just activities but therapeutic interventions that align with the principles of ecopsychology, which is also supported by researchers like Berto: “It is known that differential effects of natural and urban environments can quickly appear in physiology, and in emotional states” (250). In Robin’s case, the natural world becomes a place where his perceptions and emotional responses are not only accepted but also nurtured. The transition from a world where he constantly grapples with external expectations to one where he is at ease with his surroundings presents the role the environment plays in shaping his psychological and emotional states. Engaging with the environment offers a sense of calm and mental soothing. Theo’s reflection, “He felt pretty lucky. I did, too. Six different kinds of forest all around us. Seventeen hundred flowering plants. More tree species than in all of Europe” (22), encapsulates the serenity found in the nature. His sentiment is further pointed out when they reach a serene riverside, leading to the Robin’s transformation “back into a boy” (239) as they shed their burdens and immerse themselves in the natural setting. The description of the site, “tucked into a crook in the steep river,” (239) and their desire to “sit by the water first before we pitch the tent,” (240) underlines how the simple act of being present in a serene landscape can significantly alleviate anxieties and offer a deeper understanding and connection with the world. Moreover, the Smoky Mountains represent a place where Robin can connect with memories of his mother, deepening his sense of comfort and security. The natural setting, with its inherent stillness and absence of societal pressures, enables Robin to explore and understand his feelings in a more meaningful way.

The ecopsychological perspective suggests that such a connection with nature is not about physical presence in a natural setting but involves an emotional and psychological engagement that facilitates healing. Research indicates that interacting with nature not only enhances cognitive functioning but also improves mood, as presented in a study titled “Interacting with Nature Improves Cognition and Affect for Individuals with Depression” by Berman, Kross and Jonides: “Participants exhibited significant increases in memory span after the nature walk relative to the urban walk. Participants also showed increases in mood” (300). For Robin, the stillness of the mountains allow him to explore and understand his feelings deeply, fostering a sense of security and

comfort that he struggles to find elsewhere. The narrative extends its focus from the Smoky Mountains to include a variety of natural landscapes, each playing a role in supporting Robin's emotional and psychological stability. Thus, Robin's attention to the details of nature, from sketching moss to observing wildlife (*Bewilderment* 20), becomes a form of meditation. The detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna surrounding him paint a vivid picture of a world that is both enchanting and therapeutic as supported by the research by Richardson in "One Thousand Good Things in Nature" where it is mentioned that the beauty of nature, including its colors and sensations, and aspects like flora and fauna, contribute to positive feelings and a deeper appreciation of the natural world (613). The encounter with a heron during one of their excursions is particularly emblematic of nature's healing power. In this instance, Robin, who is usually restless, finds an unexpected stillness. "The bird afoot deep in the water fixed on nothing. So did Robin for a long hypnotic time. They stared each other down my son's forward-facing eyes and the bird's sideways one" (239). The silent communion offers a glimpse into the calming influence of nature on his psyche.

Furthermore, the setting up of their tent in a serene clearing by a rocky stream presents the significance of nature as a sanctuary for Robin, as described, "A mile of descending trail dropped us into a clearing by a rocky stream. Patches of white cascade gave way to deeper open pools. Mountain laurel and stands of mottled sycamore flanked both banks" (22). Creating a temporary dwelling amidst nature shows Robin's reliance on the natural world for stability and peace. The process of setting up their tent, where "Robin pitched it himself. He fitted the thin poles, bent them into the tent's eyelets, snapped the fabric clips onto the tensed-up exoskeleton" (22) demonstrates his active engagement with his surroundings. Around nature, Robin is not just physically present; he is emotionally and psychologically engaged, finding a sense of belonging that eludes him elsewhere, exemplified when they ponder, "'Do we need the fly? 'How lucky do you feel?'" (22).

Studies of ecopsychology show that nature interaction not only boosts mental agility but also elevates mood. As "The Importance of Children Interacting with Big Nature" by Peter H. Kahn highlights, "The scientific research has been emerging and at times coalescing with reasonably strong evidence that shows that people need to interact with nature for physical and psychological health" (9). Similarly, the natural spaces help

Robin connect with his feelings, giving him comfort and safety he cannot find elsewhere. For example, “when he asked if he could camp in the yard,” he says, “I love it out there at night. So much going on. Everything talking to everything else!” For him, “The world might be dissolving, but our backyard still felt safe” (139). His experience thus highlights the restorative influence of nature, a concept echoed in the study “Contact with Nature in Childhood and Adult Depression” by Tristan L. Snell, stating, “Individual studies indicate that for adults with depression contact with natural environments may result in improvements in mood and fewer negative symptoms” (113). The natural surroundings of the Smoky Mountains, or their backyard influence Robin’s creativity and imagination. For example, his detailed observation and sketching of the natural world, such as moss and ant nests in the thickets of rhododendrons, hickories, hemlocks, and tulip poplars, demonstrate his deep engagement with his environment as he “stopped every hundred yards to sketch a patch of moss or swarming ant nest” (22).

In ecopsychology, the importance of creativity and play in natural settings is emphasized as being vital for cognitive and emotional development, as pointed out by the findings from Kaplan & Kaplan Reasonable Person Model:

The powerful effects of the natural environment are striking because they apply so broadly yet do not require extensive exposure in terms of either time or space. Even the minimal encounters with nature afforded by the view from the window have been shown to be related to health benefits in the context of hospitals and prisons, as well as the workplace and home environment. In a large-scale, 5-year follow-up cohort study of older people, perceived access to walkable green space was found to predict longevity, even after controlling for age, socioeconomic status, gender, and marital status. (1487)

Therefore, for Robin, natural settings like the Smoky Mountains might be perceived as ideal environments where imagination can flourish, free from the constraints typical of urban life as presented by Theo “I’d pulled him from school for a week and brought him to the woods. There had been more trouble with his classmates, and we needed a time-out” (7). Such landscapes are suggested to offer individuals the chance to enhance cognitive and physical abilities, as well as to build substantial social connections and achieve emotional well-being. Moreover, Robin experiences a stark contrast between his usual environment and the natural world. For example, a butterfly, described as “more staggering than any stained-glass window,” lands on him. In that moment, “Robin held his breath, letting the visitor stumble” (224). Despite the bullying he faces

and his difficulties understanding his friends, the butterfly's presence brings him a sense of calm, prompting him to hold his breath to ensure the creature feels comfortable. Additionally, “black-striped fish the length of my pinkie” (23) swimming close to him proves the immediacy of his natural encounters. These experiences, whether it is the butterfly’s touch or navigating the waters like a crustacean, signify a departure from his regular surroundings. The natural setting he immerses in is so distinct that it’s compared to “a planet where the gravity keeps changing,” (23) illustrating the diverse and impactful sensory experiences nature offers to Robin. Engaging in mindfulness-like practices, as highlighted when he is “practicing mindfulness with instant powerful cues steering him toward the desired emotional state” (94) Robin discovers a unique space for reflection. Through these experiences, Robin not only confronts and processes his emotions but also cultivates resilience and self-control, underscoring the essential role such peaceful environments play in fostering emotional maturity.

Transitioning from this broad ecopsychological perspective to a more specific instance, it can be said that there is a parallel in the narrative of Robin. His bond with nature proves essential for his psychological development and coping strategies. Theo observes remarkable changes in his son’s behavior, a transformation that seems deeply rooted in his son’s growing connection with the natural world. He notices, “I COULD SEE THE WEEKLY CHANGES. He was quicker to laugh now, slower to flare. More playful when frustrated” (105). His change in demeanor reflects his peace, as his son becomes more attuned to the rhythms of nature, sitting still and listening to the birds at dusk, a behavior that blends into his everyday life. Furthermore, the allure of the natural world, from “The backyard birdhouses the contents of an owl pellet even the mold on an orange,” (139) captivates him, marking a departure from his previous self. His connection with nature also fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation, as Theo reflects on his son’s self-driven learning, “He’d learned more in one summer on his own than he’d learned in a year of classroom” (148). Theo’s observations highlight a shift in his son, attributing these changes to a deepening connection with the natural world. Real-life implication of nature’s therapeutic potential is further substantiated by the research of Kuo and Taylor in their study “A Potential Natural Treatment for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Evidence From a National Study.” The study provides an evidence for the role of nature in alleviating symptoms of ADHD as “The findings

outlined here, taken in the context of previous research, suggest that common after-school and weekend activities conducted in relatively natural outdoor environments may be widely effective in reducing ADHD symptoms” (1580). The research aligns with Robin, where his immersion in natural settings like the Smoky Mountains significantly aids his psychological well-being. The finding supports the ecopsychological perspective that a deep connection with nature is not only beneficial but essential for psychological health. In Robin’s case, his experiences in nature offered a respite from the overwhelming stimuli of everyday life, underlining the therapeutic potential of natural environments in fostering mental health and emotional balance.

The shift from being in natural settings to taking an active role in environmental activism signifies a significant development in Robin’s character. His evolution is reflected in Lester Brown's statement, “We cannot restore our health or sense of well-being unless we restore the health of the planet” (16). Robin’s growing awareness of the impact humans have on the environment and his desire to contribute to its healing is a vivid embodiment of this principle. His efforts, captured in the creation of a banner that carried the message “LET’S HEAL WHAT WE HURT,” illustrate his commitment to the philosophy and demonstrate his active participation in the healing of both society and the environment. His determination is further highlighted when he faces what he perceives as a legislative defeat, yet remains resolute, declaring, “I’m staying. And I’m coming back tomorrow” (122), showcasing his growing activism. Robin’s active participation in protests, as seen when he attempts to mediate between supporters and police officers, and his involvement in a protest against the destruction of life on Earth, further points out his transition into a proactive environmental advocate. Furthermore, his commitment to environmental activism culminates in his effort to raise funds through his artwork as he says “Help keep a beautiful creature alive, ma’am? Best few dollars you’ll ever spend” (112), ultimately donating a significant amount to a conservation organization. These actions collectively demonstrate Robin’s evolution from a passive observer of nature to an active participant in environmental activism. In other words, while his initial interactions with nature have unintentionally been about finding solace and managing symptoms of ADHD, his subsequent actions reveal a transformation.

Robin's journey in learning about environmentalism through Alyssa's neural activities is a pivotal aspect of his character development in the novel. When he expresses to his father, "Dad. I feel like I'm waking up. Like I'm inside everything. Look where we are! That tree. This grass! Aly used to claim" (161), his realization marks a shift in Robin's engagement with the world, leading him to become more actively involved in environmental causes. These changes are further exemplified in a scene where Robin engages in an activity designed to connect him with his mother's thoughts: "He'd trained for ninety minutes. Colored dots, musical pitches, and other feedback helped him to find and match the patterns of his mother's brain" (128). The treatment, coupled with his increasing time spent outdoors and his engagement with environmental issues, fosters a deeper connection to nature as he follows the pattern of his activist mother. Just like Robin, Aly used to do everything to protect the environment around her. Thus, the treatment provides Robin with a sense of purpose and significantly impacts his psychological health. Theodore observes the changes in his son, Robin, which he attributes to the DecNef treatment and Robin's strengthened bond with the natural world. His transformation can be observed in a scene when he steps off the bus humming and shows an increased willingness to socialize with his peers; "He lifted his head from his work and looked at some small revelation on the wall behind me. His eyes were clear and his face inquisitive, the way he used to look on his best days when his mother was still alive," (100) reflects Theodore. In these moments, Robin's newfound enthusiasm for life is unmistakable, as is his increased willingness to socialize and connect with those around him. "I feel bad for them, Dad. I really do. They're trapped inside themselves, right? Same as everyone. Except me. I've got my guys," (100) Robin muses, indicating a shift in his perspective and engagement with the world.

## **2.2 FROM CURIOSITY TO ADVOCACY: A BIOPHILIC EVOLUTION**

*Bewilderment* not only portrays a deeply personal journey but also delves into the innate human connection to the natural world, a concept central to biophilia. Robin's fascination with the natural world is illustrated in his private observations, which are meticulously documented in a notebook titled "PRIVATE OBSERVATIONS OF

ROBIN BYRNE” (139). In this notebook, Robin dedicates his time to drawing, noting descriptions, and formulating questions about different species. His notebook does not contain any personal reflections about his family or himself; instead, it is entirely devoted to his observations and thoughts about various aspects of nature as presented by Theo “Not a single word about his mother, or about me, either, for that matter. Not a line of his own private hopes or fears. The entire book was devoted to drawings, notes, descriptions, questions, speculations, and appreciation—the proof of other life” (139). One of Robin’s notable interests is in the behaviors and mysteries of different animals. His questions, such as “Where do finches go when it rains? How far does a deer walk in one year? Can a cricket remember how to get out of a maze? If a frog ate that cricket, would he learn the maze faster?” (140) reflects an interest in the movement patterns and cognitive abilities of animals. These questions indicate a deeper, scientific approach to understanding animal behavior, showcasing his ability to think critically and creatively about the natural world.

Robin’s interest in the behaviors and mysteries of different animals aligns well with the findings from the study, “Fish in a Mall Aquarium—An Ethological Investigation of Biophilia” by Atzwanger, Bookstein, and Schaefer. The study confirms the “aquarium effect” where people are naturally drawn to and stop to observe an aquarium, indicative of an inherent interest in animal behavior. The inherent fascination with animals and natural settings points out Robin’s scientific approach and critical thinking in his inquiries about animal behavior. Moreover, Robin’s admiration for the resilience of certain species is particularly highlighted in his observations about grass. He notes, “I love grass. It grows from the bottom, not the top. If something eats the tips, it doesn’t kill the plant. Only makes it grow faster” (140). Robin’s focus on biospecies and biodiversity goes beyond a mere pastime; it is a central aspect of his identity and the way he interacts with the world as he articulates questions like “I warmed a butterfly back to life with my breath” (140). Also, Robin’s effort to create an illustrated handout documenting twenty-three species threatened or endangered in Wisconsin, including the “Canada lynx, gray wolf, piping plover, and Karner blue butterfly” (115), reflects a connection to biophilia. The detailed documentation of these species in the novel resonates with the biophilic principle that knowledge and understanding of nature can

lead to a deeper appreciation and a stronger desire to protect it. As Lumber et. al state, “A connection with nature is often seen to be responsible for the creation of an environmentally responsible individual as connectedness is linked to the possession of pro-environmental attitudes and found to predict pro-environmental behavior” (4), which indicates how an understanding and connection with nature not only fosters appreciation but also motivates protective actions towards it. Throughout the novel, key scenes and dialogues exemplify Robin’s connection to nature. For instance, when Robin articulates to Officer Juffers the role of insects in sustaining food production, he demonstrates an awareness of the interconnectedness of all living systems as he says “If the insects die, we won’t be able to grow food” (203). His emotional approach in this cause, as seen in his urgency to recover the banner, reflects the emotional bond humans often feel with nature.

The theories of emotional development by L. Alan Sroufe and Carroll E. Izard further elucidate the bond between sensory experiences and biophilia. Sroufe’s model suggests that biophilia might arise from a “pleasure-joy” system, where repeated, pleasant experiences with nature cultivate an emotional connection with the natural world (580). Izard’s perspective posits biophilia as an innate emotion, embedded in humans’ genetic makeup, waiting for the right moment and context to be expressed (Barbiero and Marconato 48). Both theories agree that sensory experiences with nature are essential for developing and expressing biophilia. In this regard, it can be said that Robin’s experiences align with the idea that tactile, auditory, visual, and olfactory stimuli act as significant channels for biophilia, fostering a multisensory engagement with the natural world. According to Sroufe’s model, these pleasant and recurring experiences with nature might be nurturing a “pleasure-joy” system within Robin, cultivating an emotional bond with the environment. Furthermore, Robin’s frequent and immersive experiences in natural settings could be seen as moments that awaken and express the innate biophilic tendency regarding Izard’s theory. His reactions to the natural world, whether it is a sense of wonder at the sight of a wildlife or the tranquility he finds in natural landscapes, indicate that his biophilia is not just a learned behavior but an intrinsic part of his being. Therefore, Robin’s multisensory interactions with the natural



world are not merely enjoyable experiences; they are essential for his emotional, cognitive, and well-being.

Robin's involvement in environmental protests and efforts to create awareness about endangered species are some of the key aspects that highlight this connection. His involvement suggests a proactive stance towards environmental issues, reflecting a deeper understanding of the importance of collective action in bringing about change. Additionally, Robin's efforts to raise awareness about endangered species, such as his creation of a handout documenting threatened species in Wisconsin (146), illustrate a further dimension of his environmental stewardship. To illustrate, after months of dedicated work, Robin managed to raise a significant sum of money through his efforts. He earned \$988 in just six hours, and with an additional purchase, the total reached \$1000. This money was then sent to a conservation organization that Robin had carefully selected after much deliberation (112). His action signifies not just an interest in the natural world but also a responsibility towards its preservation. By disseminating information about endangered species, Robin plays a role in promoting biodiversity conservation. Moreover, Robin's approach to environmental issues often reflects an understanding of ecological balance. His concern for endangered species and their roles within their habitats indicates an appreciation for the ecological cycle. To illustrate, when asked if he wanted to add a message for legislators, he expressed his simple desire: "I just want to stop the killing" (115). As stated before, Robin's actions have the potential to influence others. His dedication and commitment to environmental causes can inspire those around him, including family, friends, and the broader community. As presented, "But ten thousand children with Robin's new eyes might teach us how to live on Earth" (161), highlighting how Robin's perspective and experiences could serve as a catalyst for greater environmental awareness and inspire a larger movement towards preserving nature.

As Robin embodies the principles of biophilia, his story bridges the intimate bond of a family's love for nature with the larger societal need for environmental consciousness and action. The integration of biophilia into the fabric of family life and its extension into wider community engagement exemplifies the transformative potential of these

deeply personal connections with nature. As claimed by Rolston in his study named “Biophilia, Selfish Genes, Shared Values,” human cooperation and ethics, including altruistic acts within a family, can be interpreted through evolutionary theory, where inclusive fitness evolves from “my” to “our” (390). Likewise in Robin’s story, where his biophilic connection extends from individual to collective, influencing his community through his actions and attitudes towards nature. Moreover, Rolston discusses the concept of reciprocal altruism which although limited in animals, is expanded in humans and forms the basis of cultural cooperation (400). This is mirrored in Robin’s journey, where his deep connection with nature and his family’s environmental values foster a sense of responsibility and cooperation within his community. Aly’s passion for nature and her efforts to instill a sense of environmental responsibility are pivotal in shaping Robin’s worldview. For example, Robin, while lying on the grass and looking at the stars, expresses a deep sense of being “inside everything,” echoing Aly’s belief that a sense of kinship with nature can lead to a shift in values where “economics would become ecology” (161). Her sentiment reflects the essence of biophilia, suggesting that a reconnection with nature can lead to a more sustainable and ecologically conscious lifestyle.

The influence of Aly on Robin’s environmentalism is further evident in their shared interest in birds. For instance, when observing a bird with white splotches around the eye, Robin identifies it as his mother’s favorite bird (224), revealing the impact of his mother’s interests on his own. Robin’s independent learning about species like the Bachman’s warbler (147) and his creation of handouts on endangered species demonstrate an inherent affinity towards nature. The innate inclination is likely enhanced by his family environment, which encouraged exploration and learning about the natural world, suggesting a blend of genetic predisposition and environmental influence. His advocacy is a direct reflection of the values instilled in him by his family, particularly his mother. To exemplify, after participating in a session where he was connected to his mother’s brain patterns, Robin displays a change in demeanor. The session involved steering himself into the emotional state once experienced by his mother as “They’d go out together in all seasons” (79). Following this, Robin’s behavior becomes more open and expressive, revealing a deeper emotional

understanding and connection as Robin explains “Just that I’m not scared anymore. I’m all mixed into a really huge thing. That’s the coolest part” (186).

To conclude, In *Bewilderment*, the narrative suggests that humanity’s future is closely tied to human relationship with the environment. Robin’s with nature and his advocacy for environmental issues emphasize the importance of understanding and nurturing human connection with the natural world for both personal and planetary well, as seen in Harper’s assertion that “to go into wilderness is to face the shadow of wild nature at its source. When we identify with our wilderness shadow, consume it, and assimilate it, we thereby renew this vital and powerful energy” (194). Harper’s quote suggests that embracing and integrating people’s wild nature can revitalize their connection to the environment. Powers also addresses themes of loss and healing. Robin’s journey, marked by personal loss and mental health struggles, illustrates the potential for healing and growth within the human-nature relationship. Overall, *Bewilderment* is more than a story about a child’s experiences. Rather, it reflects on the essential bond between humans and nature. Through Robin’s character, Powers demonstrates how this connection becomes important for human mental health and the health of the planet. The novel invites readers to consider the importance of valuing and caring for the natural world, not only for its intrinsic value but also for its significant impact on human well-being.

### CHAPTER 3

## FROM DEGRADATION TO RENEWAL: ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION IN *THE OVERSTORY* AND *BEWILDERMENT*

*In restoration is the preservation of the world.*

Scott Freeman, *Saving Tarboo Creek*

Ecological restoration, fundamentally, involves the recovery of ecosystems “[t]o find ways of repairing damage to disturbed ecosystems” (Gerhart 358). It encompasses a wide range of activities, from the reforestation of cleared lands to the rehabilitation of waterways and wetlands. (Rohr et al. 14). Ecopsychology, on the other hand, “is more interested in exploring the psychological consequences of repressing the ecological dimension of our existence and in advancing an ecocentric psychology” (Fisher 22). As presented in the first chapter, in *The Overstory*, Richard Powers presents the lives of multiple characters who are affected by their relationships with trees and forests. The novel explores how these connections influence their actions and beliefs, often leading them to become involved in environmental activism. Powers describes his narrative as a tribute to “the interdependence of existence into being this kind of vast ramifying branching symbiotic experiment that we’re becoming part of, that we’ve always been a part of” (Van Wing 1). Through its characters and their stories, *The Overstory* illustrates key concepts of both ecological restoration and ecopsychology. *Bewilderment* explores a range of themes, including the experience of loss, the intricacies of connection, and the human quest for meaning within a seemingly indifferent universe since “*Bewilderment* focuses on the impact of science and technology on human life, our indifference towards the environment, government inaction, and apathy in the face of the climate crisis” (Narayana and Dasai 131).

Özdağ says, “Restoration ecocriticism, as a vital ecotheory to revisit literary and cultural texts, may become one of the means to raise awareness, to bind up wounds, and to mobilize community involvement for landscape-scale Earth repair” (“Restoration Ecocriticism” 133). Her perspective is reflected in both novels, which engage in the larger, ongoing conversation about human responsibility towards nature and the

psychological implications of people's environmental actions. They highlight the need for ecological restoration, not just as a means to repair the physical environment, but also as a way to heal and nurture the human psyche. In a different article, Özdağ explores how human health and environmental health are connected, referencing Peter Barry's analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," in which he depicts the lake nearby as an ecological disaster. Özdağ suggests that diseases linked to such environments play a role and that "in an ecosystem that suffered damage of this magnitude, the illnesses that afflict Poe's characters are essentially grounded in the story's environmental problem" ("Environmental Crises" 14). She further says, "Indeed, narratives of illnesses that befall human bodies after exposure to chemical, biological, or physical agents have long marked many literary texts" (14). Similarly, the theme of the relationship between human and environmental health is further echoed in Powers' works as well. In an interview with Sage Van Wing, Richard Powers expressed that *Bewilderment* and *The Overstory* are connected by their exploration of the interdependence of existence and the symbiotic relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, highlighting its significance in tackling ecological and psychological issues. Powers described this connection as "underground," making them part of the same narrative pursued in different ways. By emphasizing the need for ecological restoration and the link between human mental health and the planet's health, Powers' works resonate with ecopsychology principles. In doing so, they not only advocate for repairing the physical environment but also for healing and nurturing the human psyche. This part of the thesis aims to delve into the interplay between ecopsychology and ecological restoration as depicted in Powers' novels, offering an understanding of these intertwined disciplines.

### **3.1 ROOTS OF RECOVERY: ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION IN POWERS' NARRATIVES**

Özdağ claims, "From its inception, ecocritical theory recited human bodies and the earth body as one integral whole" ("Restoration Ecocriticism" 133), as exemplified in works like *The Overstory* and *Bewilderment*, where the confluence of ecological restoration and ecopsychology in literature offers a framework for analyzing humans' relationship

with the Earth. Ecological restoration, in this context, is also about reestablishing a healthy, reciprocal relationship between humans and nature because “[c]aring is one component of healthy human relationships, techniques to increase caring for nature may enhance human-environment relationships” (Geist and Galatowitsch 972). The dual focus on ecological and psychological restoration compels a reevaluation of people’s environmental actions and their far-reaching implications, both for the Earth and for human psyche, emphasizing the necessity of an integrative strategy in addressing the challenges of ecological degradation because “People experience deep pleasure and release from sweating together feeling the elements of soil and water, rock and plant, while doing a common task with a visible positive outcome” (Savazzi 226).

*The Overstory* delves into the intricate and often neglected relationships between humans and nature. Through the characters of Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly, the book serves as a medium to investigate the dynamics of ecopsychology and ecological restoration. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident how personal changes and actions of individuals can reflect and embody the connection between ecopsychology and ecological restoration. To clarify, Ray and Dorothy are initially depicted as largely disconnected from nature when they are depicted as two people “for whom trees mean almost nothing” and who, even in the prime of their lives, “can’t tell an oak from a linden” and “have never given woods a second thought” (72). However, as their story unfolds, they undergo a transformation. The change is highlighted by their development of a game where Dorothy collects natural items like twigs, nuts, and leaves, and brings them back to Ray (289). Together, they use a book to identify and learn about each species, delving into aspects like history, biography, chemistry, economics, and behavioral psychology of trees like mulberry, maple, and Douglas-fir. Their activity signifies their growing appreciation and understanding of their bond with the environment, as each new tree they learn about becomes “its own distinct epic changing the story of what is possible” (289).

Jay Brinkman’s journey, especially after a turning point in his life, showcases his connection with nature. He finds solace and purpose in nurturing the trees and plants around him. His therapeutic engagement is exemplified through “the Brinkman

Woodlands Restoration Project,” where “wildness advances on all sides of the house,” with “foot-high grass”, “weedy seeding”, and “maples popping up like paired hands” (300). Nurturing of nature enhances his mental well-being, embodying a deeply personal and transformative relationship with the environment Dorothy’s relationship with nature evolves throughout the narrative, transforming from a mere background element in her life to a central, defining aspect of her existence and actions. Her transformation is evident when it is revealed that “you and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor. A billion and a half years ago the two of you parted ways. But even now after an immense journey in separate directions that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes” (288). Such an understanding leads to a change in Dorothy’s perception, where “everything they thought their backyard was is wrong and it takes some time to grow new beliefs to replace the ones that fall” (289). As she observes her surroundings, it appears as if “they sit together in silence and survey their acreage as if they have traveled to another planet” (287). The realization that “every leaf out there connects underground” impacts Dorothy, taking her relationship with nature to a deeper level. This revelation hits her “like a shocking revelation in a nineteenth-century novel of manners where one character’s awful secret ripples through every life in the entire village” (289). Her new understanding of nature is described as “every baring twig seems to Dorothy like a trial creature apart from but part of all the others,” (289) signifying a newfound respect and connection with the natural world.

Ray and Dorothy’s journey from a disconnection with nature takes a shift as they engage in ecological restoration, particularly in their garden. Their involvement develops beyond a mere hobby, evolving into a stance of resistance and personal commitment. This shift is highlighted by Dorothy’s confronting legal obstacles due to their non-traditional approach to gardening. The narrative illustrates this point: “Dorothy will countersue, fighting in court until the last appeal. The anarchy of new seedlings and next spring is on her side... She looks out back through the window on the riot of new growth” (301). Their rebellion against the norms of landscaping is symbolized by the “anarchy of new seedlings” in their yard, epitomizing wild, natural growth in contrast to manicured lawns. Sharing these developments with Ray, they not only deepen their connection with each other but also with the natural world just outside

their window. Their deepening bond with nature propels Ray and Dorothy into the realm of ecological restoration. As they look out on “the chestnut, the tree that shouldn’t be there,” they begin to acknowledge not just the inherent value of the natural world, but also the pressing need for proactive involvement in its restoration and protection. The sight of “twenty-two species of birds this last week alone” and the presence of a fox only reinforce their commitment. Despite facing “thousands in compounding penalties” for civil disobedience, they find that “the view from the house has been much improved” (300). In other words, as Ray and Dorothy’s mental and emotional states improve through their interactions with nature, they become increasingly involved in activities that promote ecological health. Ray’s life-altering brain injury, metaphorically echoing the disruptive forces on nature, ignites a shift in their lives. His personal upheaval, mirrored in the novel’s broader theme of ecological degradation, presents the symbiotic relationship between human well-being and environmental health. “FROM ENLIGHTENMENT to the dam burst in Ray Brinkman’s brain takes thirteen seconds,” (82) encapsulating the sudden impact of this personal crisis. As Ray watches the news, the destruction of Palestinian olive groves on the television screen blurs into a personal catastrophe that mirrors the larger narrative of ecological degradation.

The narrative further deepens this connection when, in a moment of revelation, Ray’s contemplation on the inadequacy of the legal system to protect the environment parallels his physical collapse: “At that thought the vessels in his brain give way the way that earth does when roots no longer hold it together” (177). The flood of blood in Ray’s brain, bringing a revelation as he lifts his eyes “to the window to the mysterious outside,” (325) symbolizes the urgent need to recognize and act upon the imminent threats to the environment, illustrating how personal upheaval reflects broader ecological crises. On the other hand, Dorothy’s unfulfilled yearning for motherhood, juxtaposed with the narrative of environmental factors impacting fertility, subtly points out the broader implications of ecological decline on human life. Her aspect of the story reflects the intricate relationship between environmental health and human well-being, emphasizing the need for a balanced ecosystem. Research supports the notion that environmental toxins can have adverse effects on fertility as Pizzorno suggests “A significant cause of this progressive loss of fertility is increasing body load of



environmental toxins in both men and women,” (8) making Dorothy’s personal journey a reflection of a wider environmental reality. Her story, therefore, moves beyond the individual to show a universal concern, underscoring the critical importance of addressing ecological degradation for the benefit of all.

Their garden becomes a testament to nature’s resilience and its ability to renew itself despite their personal challenges. The transformation is illustrated in the “Brinkman Woodlands Restoration Project,” where “wildness advances on all sides of the house. The grass is foot-high clumped weedy seeding and thick with native volunteers. Maples pop up everywhere like paired hands” (152), symbolizing their dedication to environmental care. As their connection with the natural world deepens, the act of planting a linden tree becomes a metaphor for their own psychological healing. The linden, or “the bee tree, the tree of peace whose tonics and teas can cure every kind of tension and anxiety,” (80) stands out not just for its unique beauty but for its role in their lives. This tree, which “cannot be mistaken for any other,” (10) symbolizes the peace and tranquility they begin to find in their own lives, echoing the broader theme of ecological and personal restoration. The act of planting and nurturing the linden becomes a ritual of healing, reflecting their growing awareness and appreciation for the life around them, and symbolizing their own psychological healing process, which aligns with the findings of Hassan and Deshun, who demonstrate the neurophysiological benefits of engaging with plants (2). The research indicates that activities like “[w]atering plants, a commonplace HA, symbolizes the nurturing process, offering a tangible way to engage with nature Daily” (2). Such activities showcases a deeper appreciation for life and symbolize the psychological healing process, intertwining the physical act of gardening with mental well-being and highlighting the connection between humans and the natural environment.

In Isak Sköld’s analysis, *The Overstory* is presented as a narrative that fundamentally shifts perspectives towards an ecocentric worldview. Sköld notes, “trees are shown as possessing an understanding of nature placing humans in a less dominant position” (4). Sköld’s insight supports the symbolic role of the linden tree in the novel, embodying both the tranquility Ray and Dorothy discover and the broader theme of ecological and personal restoration. The linden’s significance thus reflects a journey towards deeper

ecological awareness, aligning with Sköld's assertion that the novel champions a move towards recognizing trees as sovereign entities within their ecosystems. Moreover, their exploration into the realms of botany, inspired by works such as *The Secret Forest*, enriches their understanding and appreciation of the natural world as presented "A page or two may take them a day. Everything they thought their backyard was is wrong, and it takes some time to grow new beliefs to replace the ones that fall. They sit together in silence and survey their acreage as if they have traveled to another planet" (289). Their journey of discovery fosters a deep, transformative bond between them and nature, capturing the essence of ecopsychology that views the human-nature relationship as essential for emotional health and environmental consciousness.

As mentioned before, *The Overstory* signifies the link between people and the natural world, a concept mirrored in the teachings of many Indigenous cultures and highlighted by Alexis Lassman's observations on ecopsychology in her article "Healing Ourselves and the Earth with Ecopsychology." The character known only as "a man in a red plaid coat" (*The Overstory* 314) embodies the spirit of ecological restoration, acting as a bridge between the novel's human characters and the deeper ecological insights it seeks to impart as claimed "As the connection with the Earth is slowly restored and our healing deepens, a heightened consciousness may arise regarding our unbalanced lifestyle decisions" (Lassman 1). To illustrate, "the man in a red plaid coat" appears as Nick works on a project in the woods, representing a tangible connection between human efforts and ecological insights. The man silently contributes to Nick's project by fitting a fallen branch into the pattern Nick is creating on the forest floor as depicted "The visitor looks at Nicholas's creation. Then he picks up a nearby fallen branch and fits it into the pattern" (314). The act is not only a direct help to Nick's work but also symbolizes a deeper understanding and support of the ecological restoration efforts depicted in the novel. The man's simple action of placing the branch suggests a collaborative spirit and a shared understanding of the importance of nurturing and restoring the natural environment.

Lassman's article highlights the synergy between ecopsychology and indigenous knowledge systems. It elucidates how the feelings of grief, emptiness, and fear experienced by many individuals can be interpreted as a natural response to the

dissonance created by modern society's demands, which often alienate people from their ecological roots. Within the context of *The Overstory*, the perspective is presented through the interactions between characters and their engagement with the environment. During a moment of reflection, Nick shares his awe at the ability of trees to communicate, stating, "It amazes me how much they say, when you let them. They're not that hard to hear" (321). His realization points out the idea that nature speaks to those who are willing to listen. The man in the red plaid coat responds with a historical reference, "We've been trying to tell you that since 1492" (320), highlighting the long-standing Indigenous wisdom that advocates for a harmonious and attentive relationship with nature. The exchange illuminates the concept that engaging with the environment can unlock deep insights into human dependency with the natural world, a principle shared by both ecopsychology and Indigenous knowledge as claimed "Traditionally, many Native and Indigenous peoples have been living by the principles of ecopsychology throughout history and these concepts are already an integral part of their science, cosmology, and spirituality" (Lassman 1). Drawing upon the principle of "All my Relations," a worldview deeply rooted in many Native and indigenous cultures as depicted by Lassman (1), the narrative presents an exploration of characters engaging humorously against a backdrop of sustenance derived from the land.

Through the story of Theo and Robin, *Bewilderment* delves into how restoring natural environments parallels the process of healing and self-discovery. The connection is significant as it reflects a growing awareness and necessity for ecological preservation in the face of global environmental crises. While Powers does not focus on traditional restoration projects like reforestation or invasive species removal, the novel metaphorically addresses ecological consciousness through the characters' deep bonds with the natural world. For Theo and Robin, nature provides solace, healing, and connection, whether they are stargazing, exploring virtual exoplanets, or simply being in the wilderness. The symbolic meaning of restoring ecosystems in *Bewilderment* extends beyond the physical rejuvenation of habitats to encompass the restoration of the human spirit and the parent-child bond. For example, Theo's work on simulating extraterrestrial ecosystems on exoplanets introduces a novel form of ecological restoration. By creating virtual renditions of potentially habitable worlds, the narrative

suggests a form of ecological preservation and restoration that transcends Earth's boundaries. Also, the novel's exploration of astrobiology and the search for life on other planets emphasizes the symbolic relationship. Theo's career focuses on finding life beyond Earth, and he is fascinated by exoplanets and their mysteries. He believes that "the life we'd found in Earth's harshest regions could easily thrive in many of the regions now springing up throughout space" (47). His pursuit contrasts with his personal dedication to conserving the life that currently inhabits Earth. Moreover, the exploration of simulated alien worlds not only showcases the vast possibilities of life beyond Earth but also serves as a reflection of the unique of life on the planet as claimed "We watched for millions of years. Microbes bumped up against their limits like a float thumping a dock. Every time life tried to break loose the planet twirled, beating it back down to extremophiles" (19), highlighting the interplay of human quest for knowledge in the cosmos and the responsibility to protect and cherish the life that dwells on Earth.

For Robin, his experience with nature deepens his empathy for all living beings. To illustrate, Robin and his father encounter a bear jam, causing a traffic stop to watch a bear family. Amidst the excitement, Robin's reaction is notably empathetic and critical. After observing the bears, he returns to the car, deeply affected by the spectacle. He expresses his feelings, saying, "They must really hate us. How would you like to star in a freak show?" (36) The moment, where Robin reflects on the bears' likely feelings about being an unwilling spectacle for humans, highlights his deep empathy. His concern is not just for their momentary inconvenience but extends to a broader distress over how humans treat other living beings. Robin's empathy is further emphasized when he later comments on the intelligence of bears, suggesting they are "Smarter" because "They don't do this," (37) referring to the human encroachment and commercialization around nature.

Robin's curiosity for living creatures serve as a testament to the role knowledge plays in ecological preservation efforts. Through Robin's voracious reading and learning about wildlife and ecosystems, Powers emphasizes the importance of environmental education in fostering a conservation ethic. "He ran inside again and returned with a compact

paperback: *Mammals of the Smokies*” (7) illustrates Robin’s eager curiosity. This moment, paired with Robin’s fascination with an emergency flashlight— “He held up an emergency flashlight, the kind you charge by cranking”—and their shared experience under “our galaxy’s four hundred billion stars,” (8) showcases his curiosity for living creatures. These scenes serve as a testament to the role knowledge plays in ecological preservation efforts. A moment capturing this theme occurs when Robin and his father encounter a heron by the stream. The bird, “a piece of standing driftwood,” suddenly strikes the water, catching a fish “the size of astonishment,” (240) prompting Robin to whoop in sheer amazement. His spontaneous reaction to the heron’s hunt “The fish seemed too big to slip down the bird’s throat. But that baggy gullet opened, and in another moment, not even a bulge betrayed what had happened” (240) illustrates Robin’s connection to the natural world. As they continue their journey, they stumble upon a stretch of stream covered in cairns, which Robin’s mother had always found disturbing. The sight elicits a strong emotional response from both, recognizing the harm these human-made structures cause to the aquatic habitat. They decide to dismantle the cairns, a process during which Robin is particularly careful, “peering through the clear water for the best place to replace each stone,” (241) showing a respect and empathy for the river’s ecosystem. The act of restoring the stream’s natural state emphasizes the narrative’s emphasis on the healing effects of engaging with the environment. Robin’s consideration for the creatures affected by the cairns, as reflected in the passage, “His eyes darted, searching out the chub and shiners and trout and salamanders and algae and crayfish and waterborne larvae and the endangered madtoms and hellbenders, all sacrificed to this turf-marking art” (240), demonstrates a deep understanding of interconnectivity within ecosystems.

Ecological restoration becomes a metaphor for addressing the emotional and existential crises that the characters face, suggesting that the process of healing the planet cannot be separated from healing the human mind. To exemplify, when Robin and Theo come upon a stretch of stream covered in cairns, they decide to dismantle cairns in the river (241). These cairns, while often created by visitors as a form of art or to mark their presence, actually disrupt the natural habitat of the river’s ecosystem, harming the living beings that call it home. Dismantling the cairns symbolizes a direct engagement with

ecological restoration, embodying the characters' desire to undo harm as "They destroy the homes of everything in the river" (240) and restore balance to the natural environment. However, the physical act of restoration parallels the emotional and existential healing journey of the characters themselves. Through the shared endeavor, the father and son connect more deeply with each other and the world around them. The cairns are Robin's "mother's worst nightmare," and Theo compares it to creatures from another world, saying, "Imagine creatures from another world materializing in our airspace and tearing up our neighborhoods, again and again," (240) navigating their grief and finding solace in their attempt to make amends for human impact on nature.

### 3.2 PASSING AS A CALL TO ECOLOGICAL ACTION

The intersection of literature and environmental activism emerges as a catalyst for change, explored through "Restoration Ecocriticism," a concept articulated by the ecocritic, Özdağ. She asserts that fiction, through its narrative power and emotional resonance, can inspire action towards the restoration of the planet's degraded landscapes. She suggests that "The goal of restoration ecocriticism, then, is to highlight literary texts that will support an emerging ecological citizenship dedicated to restoring degraded lands, as well as to bring awareness about the actual land healing efforts in the most hands-on way" ("Restoration Ecocriticism" 126). Her perspective unveils the deaths of characters in Richard Powers' *The Overstory* and *Bewilderment*, examining how the deaths of Olivia and Robin transcend mere narrative devices to become potent symbols of ecological preservation. The demises of these characters may highlight the critical importance of environmental protection and encourage readers to participate in efforts to heal the planet. By weaving together the theoretical insights of Özdağ with the emotive narratives crafted by Powers, this part aims to illuminate the symbiotic relationship between literature and ecological restoration, showcasing how fictional worlds can inspire real-world activism and foster a deeper connection to the natural world. Olivia Vandergriff's death in *The Overstory* serves as a moment, both narratively and thematically, casting a long shadow over the novel's intricate exploration of ecological restoration and human-nature relationships as depicted "Her second and final death, after she has led environmentalist actions that include a year-long tree-sit in a giant redwood, is the pivotal crisis in the novel, evoking the death of Christ in the

desolation and scattering with which it afflicts her disciples” (Saint-Amour 143). Olivia’s death, while defending the natural world she came to revere, underscores the extreme lengths to which individuals might go to protect the environment. As “her clothes burn, then her skin,” (252) there is both a literal and metaphorical transformation, symbolizing not just the physical loss but the burning away of a former life for something greater. The inscription on her scapula, “A change is gonna come,” (252) which blackens and vaporizes, serves as a reminder of her dedication and the hopeful yet harsh reality of their fight. The narrative describes how “flames bear the flecks of her carbonized soul into the air,” (252) illustrating the dispersal of her essence into the cause she lived for. The acknowledgment that “the corpse will be found” and that every clue will be “discovered and read” signifies not an attempt to hide their actions but to make a statement, to send her “into forever” (252). Through this act, the intention is not just disposing of a body; it is declaring an undying commitment to their cause, emphasizing the lengths to which Olivia and others like her are willing to go to protect what they hold dear.

According to Saint-Amour, Olivia’s demise is not just a tale of personal loss but a broader commentary on the essential unity of all life forms, reinforcing the need for a collective reawakening to environmental stewardship (144). Saint-Amour illustrates how Olivia’s demise transcends her physical absence, impacting her companions and resonating through their continued environmental endeavors. As they navigate the consequences of their activism, they are reminded that “the world is full of welfare that must come even before your own kind,” (*The Overstory* 298) pointing out the necessity of prioritizing the collective well-being of the planet over individual interests. Woven with the personal sacrifices and ethical quandaries of those touched by Olivia’s resolve, their questioning shows the intricate play between personal loss, environmental advocacy, and the overarching quest for a harmonious existence with the Earth. Olivia’s death not only shows the personal tragedy but also amplifies *The Overstory’s* critique of a contemporary society largely indifferent to the deteriorating natural environment as “*The Overstory* envisions tree life as the embodiment of some kind of cosmo-arborealism, and humans absent themselves from this more-than-human order at their own peril” (Schoene 22). Through her story, Powers delves into the underlying values and systems that favor immediate contemplation over the sustainable health of the

planet, urging a reevaluation of the legacy humanity intends to leave behind which is the anthropocentric practices of humanity. A somber discovery at a site earmarked for a resort, following an arson, reveals not just a young woman's remains but also enigmatic messages: "CONTROL KILLS, CONNECTION HEALS, COME HOME OR DIE, For you have five trees in Paradise" (301) but also serve as a reflection of the novel's central thesis, juxtaposing the destructive impulses of control against the healing potential of reconnection with the natural world.

In *Bewilderment*, Robin's deep connection to nature and his perspective on the world are central themes that intertwine with the narrative's exploration of environmental activism and the emotional stakes it carries. Robin's innocence and passion for nature, coupled with his struggles and his demise, symbolize the broader tragedy of environmental degradation. The tragic event takes place during a camping trip, unfolding under the quiet cover of night. In the stillness of a camping trip night, a distressing event unfolds. Theo, awakened by the silence, realizes Robin is not in their tent. Driven by his intrinsic need to connect with nature, Robin had ventured out to "[d]ismantle cairns. Turning the river back into a safe home" for its dwellers, leaving his father in a state of panic. Theo's search ends when he finds Robin "soaked up to the top of his rib cage," (246) trembling from the cold on a small island within the stream, actively engaged in his mission of ecological care. The desperation of Theo's attempts to save his son is palpable. Despite these efforts, Robin's condition rapidly deteriorates. The narrative captures the moment with stark clarity: "I lifted him onto the tiny island he'd been hugging and held him in place while I climbed up next to him. Even with all my friction his skin slipped from red toward blue. A long time passed before I could accept that he no longer needed me" (247). In this interpretation, Robin's character serves as a reminder of what is at stake in the fight to preserve the natural world. His loss is not just a personal tragedy for his father and those who loved him, but also represents a symbolic loss for the environment itself.

Robin's story becomes a rallying cry for ecological restoration, emphasizing that individual and collective actions are crucial for initiating meaningful environmental change. In an NPR interview, Powers articulates this thematic underpinning by



highlighting the narrative's genesis, rooted in the desire "to tell the story of one person who begins to think about the world in a much different way, where we aren't separate from but we are reciprocally interbraided with other living things" (1). His statement reinforces the critical message that humans are not solitary entities but part of a larger, interconnected ecological system. Moreover, Robin's character, who is portrayed as being "obsessed with human beings' mass killings of animals and the destruction of our planet," (1) serves as a reflection of humanity itself, mirroring the often overlooked atrocities committed against the Earth. Powers' deliberate choice to center the narrative around a child's perspective not only amplifies the innocence and purity of concern for the natural world but also serves as a critique of adult complacency and the societal propensity to ignore the ongoing environmental degradation. As Powers himself notes, the book is a testament to the idea that "it's that culture that has to shift if we want to stick around here much longer" (1), presenting the narrative's role as both a mirror to current realities and a beacon of hope for future stewardship. Robin's and Olivia's ecological convictions, fortified by their experiences and actions, embody the narrative's core environmental concerns. Olivia's transformative awakening amidst ancient trees and her active resistance against deforestation, coupled with Robin's environmental consciousness, cultivated through his mother's activism and his father's guidance, illustrate how individual and collective actions today are pivotal in shaping a legacy of environmental restoration and protection. Olivia's engagement with direct environmental action and Robin's intuitive connection to nature, as seen in his passionate dismantling of cairns to restore a stream's natural state, serve as narratives that inspire continued dedication to environmental causes.

Olivia's engagement with ecological values is active and direct. She participates in protests and takes bold actions to protect forests, embodying the frontline activism that often characterizes efforts to combat environmental degradation. To illustrate, she addresses the urgency of action against rampant deforestation, underscoring the insufficiency of legislative measures to timely protect ancient trees from being turned into planks at an alarming rate. Her words, "The new efficient Humboldt Timber will have killed all the giants by the time the law catches up with them. What can you bring to the effort? We'll take anything you can give. Time. Effort. Cash. Cash is surprisingly

helpful!” (*The Overstory* 187), highlight her direct involvement in mobilizing resources and people to counteract the environmental destruction perpetrated by corporate greed before it’s too late. Robin, on the other hand, represents a more reflective and emotional engagement with nature. His question, “Did you know that the world’s corals will be dead in six more years?” (*Bewilderment* 135) embodies his ecological values—rooted in sensitivity to nature and a keen awareness of its vulnerabilities. His expression of grief for the environment’s losses marks Robin’s unique approach to environmentalism. It is not through traditional activism but through a deep emotional and psychological connection to the natural world that Robin contributes to the discourse on environmental preservation. Through Olivia and Robin, Powers articulates a broad spectrum of ecological engagement, from active resistance to reflective mourning. Olivia’s activism and Robin’s sensitive connection to the natural world illustrate different but complementary paths to fostering ecological values. While their approaches and the manifestation of their ecological values differ, both characters ultimately show the importance of deep, personal connections to nature in motivating actions toward ecological restoration.

Olivia’s death is fueled by their commitment to the environment, and the memory of her may inspire the living to persist in the fight for ecological preservation. Her memory serves as a powerful motivator for Adam and Douglas, encouraging them to continue their environmental advocacy despite the pain of losing her. This loss not only affects them personally but also reinforces their commitment to the cause. Adam, in particular, has problems with the consequences of their actions, haunted by whether their efforts could justify the cost of Olivia’s life. He reflects on the significance and repercussions of their choices, pondering, “So you’d do it all again? What we did?” (285). Adam’s introspection highlights his struggle with guilt and the desire for their actions to have meaningful impact, questioning, “I ask myself at nights whether anything we did—anything we could have done—would ever make up for that woman’s death” (284). Adam finds himself haunted by Olivia’s memory, pondering the questions that challenge their cause’s efficacy. “We accomplished nothing,” (284) Adam admits, capturing the essence of his turmoil and the group’s existential crisis. His admission sheds light on the stark contrast between their noble intentions to safeguard the

environment and the harsh reality of their actions' limited effects. Similarly, Douglas's transformation into a figure of unwavering dedication to their cause, driven by the desire to honor her legacy, is evident in the depth of his actions and reflections. His journey from awakening to action is poetically described as the moment "the scales fell from his eyes," leading to an awareness that turned into anger. Douglas finds solace and purpose in the company of "like-minded people" and experiences a connection with nature so deep he feels he "heard the trees speak" (264). Douglas's decision-making, even under the threat of severe legal consequences, marks his commitment. Confronted with the grim prospect of losing his freedom unless he turns against his allies, Douglas keeps silent, valuing the protection of his comrades above his own liberty. He is indifferent to the duration of his imprisonment, whether it be "seven years or seven hundred." What gives him a sense of purpose is the chance to secure safety for "the woman who had taken him in and a man who seemed to be out there still fighting against humanity's death wish" (292). His choice reflects Douglas's deep commitment to his principles and the cause, prioritizing the wellbeing of his fellow activists over his personal freedom.

Similarly, Robin affects his father, Theo, not just emotionally but also in terms of ecological consciousness. Theo's reflection, "The universe is a living thing, and my son wants to take me for a quick look around while there's still time," (*Bewilderment* 252) is a reminder of the link personal loss and a broader ecological enlightenment. It suggests that the appreciation for and understanding of the natural world is not just an intellectual exercise but a deeply emotional journey shaped by the bonds people hold dear and the losses people endure. Through the vivid portrayal of their lives and sacrifices, Powers does not merely tell stories but rather sows seeds of inspiration for ecological restoration. These characters embody the very essence of Özdağ's argument: that literature can be a force for mobilizing individuals and communities to engage in the restoration of degraded landscapes ("Restoration Ecocriticism" 133). In the intricate narratives of Olivia's proactive environmental activism and Robin's emotional environmentalism, Richard Powers presents the complex, layered essence of engagement with environmental concerns. Olivia's narrative, characterized by her unwavering defiance against the forces of deforestation, juxtaposed with Robin's

nuanced, contemplative grappling with the loss of biodiversity, exemplifies the broad spectrum of ecological activism. It highlights that commitment to ecological preservation and restoration need not be monolithic but can accommodate a range of expressions, from the physical to the psychological.

Such a portrayal aligns with scholarly discussions on environmental activism, which acknowledge the multifaceted approaches individuals take towards ecological conservation. For instance, studies within the field of ecocriticism, such as those by Greg Garrard in "Ecocriticism" (2004), explore the myriad ways literature reflects as "Ecocritics may not be qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology, but they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own 'ecological literacy' as far as possible" (Garrard 5). Garrard's analysis provides a theoretical frame against which the narratives of characters like Olivia and Robin can be situated, suggesting that literature not only mirrors the complexities of human interaction with the natural world but also plays a pivotal role in shaping and inspiring that interaction. Furthermore, the depiction of such varied forms of environmental engagement in Powers' narratives serves as a testament to the premise that involvement in ecological efforts can manifest across a broad spectrum. The academic discourse on environmental humanities often emphasizes the value of diverse narratives in fostering a more inclusive and holistic approach to ecological activism, as discussed in works like Rob Nixon's "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor" (2011), which examines the power of narrative in drawing attention to "[t]o stress those places where writers and social movements, often in complicated tandem, have strategized against attritional disasters that afflict embattled communities" (Nixon 5).

By presenting characters like Olivia and Robin, Powers not only contributes to the literary exploration of environmental themes but also engages with ongoing academic conversations about the efficacy and scope of ecological activism. Through these narratives, Powers affirms the significance of both external actions and internal reflections in the broader quest for environmental preservation, offering a nuanced, comprehensive portrayal of what it means to be engaged in the fight against ecological degradation. The capacity of literature to engender a connection with the natural world,

as articulated through the emotionally resonant narratives of characters like Olivia and Robin, is reflective of a broader scholarly discourse on the interplay between fiction and environmental consciousness. The relation, as posited by Özdağ, suggests that fiction plays an indispensable role in deepening readers' engagement with the environment beyond mere cognitive recognition of ecological dilemmas ("Restoration Ecocriticism" 132). Through the immersive experience of literary engagement, readers are invited to traverse an emotional landscape that encourages introspection about their bond with nature and their participatory role in the environmental movement.

Such narratives serve not only as mirrors reflecting the complexity of human-nature relationships but also as catalysts that inspire readers to reconsider their environmental impact and agency. In this context, the work of Glen A. Love in his seminal piece "Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment" (2003) can be referenced as a foundational academic source that explores how literature can function as an effective medium for fostering ecological awareness and instigating action. As he explains:

As the circumstances of the natural world intrude ever more pressingly into our teaching and writing, the need to consider the interconnections, the implicit dialogue between the text and the environmental surroundings, becomes more and more insistent. Ecocriticism is developing as an explicit critical response to this unheard dialogue, an attempt to raise it to a higher level of human consciousness. Teaching and studying literature without reference to the natural conditions of the world and the basic ecological principles that underlie all life seems increasingly shortsighted, incongruous. (10)

By experiencing the struggles and revelations of characters intertwined with ecological themes, readers can develop a renewed sense of urgency and commitment to environmental stewardship. The narratives of Olivia and Robin, therefore, stand as examples of how literature can bridge the gap between awareness and action in the context of ecological restoration. By drawing readers into a deep, empathetic engagement with the characters' lives and sacrifices, Powers utilizes fiction as a tool for environmental advocacy. These stories do not just advocate for ecological restoration; they can also inspire readers to become active participants in the movement towards environmental sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

In his book *The Diversity of Life* (1992), Wilson asserts, “Humanity coevolved with the rest of life on this particular planet; other worlds are not in our genes” (393), emphasizing the fundamental bond between humans and Earth’s biodiversity. Similarly, Roszak’s work in “Where Psyche Meets Gaia” (1995) highlights the importance of ecopsychology, the study of the relationship between human psychology and the natural environment, and he notes, “He [E. O. Wilson] sees this as an important force working to defend the endangered biodiversity of the planet. Even an impressionistic survey of folklore and fairy tale and of the religious life of indigenous people would surely yield a great deal of support for the idea” (4). Roszak further explains the potential of ecopsychology to redefine mental health, stating, “In a sense, ecopsychology might be seen as a commitment by psychologists and therapists to the hope that the biophilia hypothesis will prove true and so become an integral part of what we take mental health to be” (4), reflecting his view that integrating a love for nature (biophilia) into mental health practices could enhance psychological well-being. Hence, Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) and *Bewilderment* (2021), illustrate the relevance of biophilia and ecopsychology since in both novels Powers asks questions like

Namely, how did we lose our sense of living here on Earth? How did we become so alienated and estranged from everything else alive? How did we get convinced that we’re the only interesting game in town, and the only species worthy of extending a sense of the sacred to? (“Richard Powers Speaks For the Trees”)

The two concepts are evident through various characters and narratives that depict the connection between humans and nature and the psychological and emotional impacts of the coevolutionary relationship. Powers’ novels portray interactions between humans and the environment, as scrutinized by Wilson in his study on biophilia and Roszak’s work on ecopsychology. Thus, the analysis unveils perspectives on both the restorative capacities of the natural world on the human mind and the detrimental effects arising from its degradation. By exploring these themes, the study illuminates the dual aspects of nature highlighting the critical balance that must be maintained to safeguard both human and ecological well-being, ideas also put forth by Wilson and Roszak following their extensive research.

In *The Overstory*, biophilia is presented in the characters and narratives. For instance, Patricia's discovery of the "wood wide web" illustrates the interrelation of humans with environment and the ecological wisdom inherent in nature. Her research reveals that trees protect each other, reinforcing the idea that harming one part of the natural world harms the whole system, including humans. Furthermore, Mimi's bond with the pine trees, reinforced by emotional ties to her father and childhood, illustrates the depth of her biophilia and its role in shaping her environmental activism even though she had no interest in the beginning. Her connection to nature aligns with Wilson's biophilia hypothesis as Wilson states, "Humanity is exalted not because we are so far above other living creatures, but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of life" (*Biophilia* 22), highlighting the role that Mimi play when she embraces the intimate knowledge and relationships with the environment. Wilson further emphasizes that "our existence depends on this propensity, our spirit is woven from it, hope rises on its currents" (10), indicating that the well-being of humans is linked to their relationship with nature.

Neelay Metha's biophilia is evident through his dual fascination with both technology and nature. Inspired by the natural world's intricacies, he channels his appreciation into creating a video game, *Mastery*, which allows players to engage with virtual natural landscapes. Despite the game's anti-ecological themes, Neelay's engagement with nature drives him to create a representation of the natural world by using real world examples such as "Queensland Bottle Tree", reflecting his biophilic tendencies. His resilience can be seen in Wilson's statement, "Every species is a magic well. Biologists have until recently been satisfied with the estimate that there are between three and ten million of them on Earth. Now many believe that ten million is too low" (*Biophilia*, 19) because Neelay's understanding of the natural world deepens as he understands the richness of biodiversity, leading to a shift in his perspective. Influenced by Patricia's book, *The Secret Forest*, he begins to incorporate sustainable and regenerative principles into his game design. His transformation highlights his evolving biophilic orientation, as he seeks to promote a model of growth that prioritizes ecological balance and harmony aligning with Wilson's belief that "to the degree that we come to understand other organisms, we will place a greater value on them, and on ourselves"

(*Biophilia*, 2), emphasizing the importance of understanding and valuing the natural world as integral to human growth and well-being.

Adam Appich's love for nature and connection to the natural world are evident from his childhood. Growing up in Illinois, Adam spent his days observing insects and other creatures on a maple tree, finding refuge and solace in the natural environment amidst a dysfunctional family. His academic pursuits in psychology, particularly his study of "transformative potential as a function of strong normative in-group favoritism" (*The Overstory* 197) on environmentalist, highlight his biophilic inclinations and his deep connection to the natural world. His affinity with trees from a young age exemplifies this evolutionary connection, as he instinctively sought refuge and emotional balance in nature, aligning with the concept of biophilia since "Wilson argued that these affiliations are the result of millennia of human evolution in a natural environment, where repeated contact with, and dependence on life and life-like processes was crucial for hominin survival and reproduction" (Joye and De Block 190). Adam's transition from research to activism reflects the influence of biophilia on his values and actions, highlighting the hypothesis' role in fostering a commitment to environmental conservation and ethics. Similarly, Nicholas Hoel's connection to nature is influenced by his family's Chestnut project, which instilled in him a love for nature. The Hoel family's dedication to the Chestnut project, where they photograph the tree every month from the same angle, fosters a deep connection to nature. Nicholas's artistic journey is deeply rooted in his biophilic tendencies. His artwork often reflects his admiration for trees and nature. His art not only celebrates the beauty of trees but also serves as a form of environmental advocacy, raising awareness about the importance of preserving nature. In *Bewilderment*, biophilia is explored through the character of Robin, a young boy with neurodiverse conditions. Robin's innate love for nature is visible and it is evident in Robin's fascination with various aspects of nature and his deep admiration for its resilience and ingenuity. His scientific curiosity about the lives and behaviors of different species is reflective of an innate desire to connect with and understand other forms of life. Robin's environmental activism is a testament to his deep love for and connection to nature just like Adam, Mimi, and Nicholas in *The Overstory*.



Roszak claims, “Ecopsychology suggests that we can read our transactions with the natural environment—the way we use or abuse the planet” (5). To better understand how ecopsychology is addressed in Richard Powers’ novels, it is essential to briefly discuss the mental disorders portrayed in both novels. In *The Overstory*, various characters struggle with mental disorders, which are intricately tied to their connections with nature. Adam Appich, for instance, exhibits traits of autism spectrum disorder during his childhood, finding solace in observing insects and non-human life on a maple tree. Mimi Ma shows signs of depression following the suicide of her father, Winston Ma. Her depression is portrayed through her ritual of sitting under the pine trees in front of her office, finding peace and relief in their presence. Douglas Pavlicek, a Vietnam War veteran, suffers from PTSD. He finds healing and a sense of purpose through his commitment to environmental causes. His bond with a banyan tree and his participation in reforestation efforts help him cope with his trauma. Nicholas Hoel experiences grief following the deaths of his family members and the destruction of the Hoel chestnut tree. Patricia Westerford battles depression, particularly after facing professional rejection and personal losses. Olivia Vandergriff initially struggles with alcoholism and a sense of aimlessness. Likewise, in *Bewilderment*, Powers delves into the complex psychological landscape of Robin with neurodiverse conditions that include ADHD, autism, and OCD. Robin’s struggle with these conditions is depicted through his intense emotional responses and his deep connection to nature. His way of processing the world is further exemplified by his repetitive behaviors, such as rereading books immediately after finishing them. Moreover, Robin’s emotional state is influenced by the grief of losing his mother. His emotional responses are intense and sometimes volatile, reflecting his struggle to process and cope with this loss and Theo reflects on this, stating, “The same mother whose death sent the boy into a downward spiral” (185).

According to Roszak, there is an interplay between planetary and personal well-being, highlighting that “the environmental crisis has become the news of the day every day” (308). The constant presence of environmental issues in the daily lives of people makes natural phenomena relevant. Thus, by analyzing these novels through ecopsychology, it can be possible to uncover deeper insights into the role that a harmonious relationship with nature plays in addressing the intertwined challenges of individual mental health

and planetary sustainability. For example, Patricia's journey into the forest and her reflections presents the importance of a mutual relation with nature for human health and collective well-being. Her experience in forest acts as a form of natural therapy, catalyzing her journey towards recovery and personal growth. Additionally, Patricia's dedication to preserving forests is illustrated through her opposition to logging on sensitive federal lands. As an expert witness in Portland, she aims to highlight the ecological impact of logging, emphasizing the broader ecological roles of forests beyond human utility. She mentions, "Birds, mammals, and other plants. Tens of thousands of invertebrates. Three-quarters of the region's amphibians need them. A dead tree is an infinite hotel" (218), which reinforces the ecological significance of forests and Patricia's belief in the urgent need to view themselves as part of a larger ecological web, rather than its center.

Roszak claims, "Ecopsychology suggests that the environmental movement has other means to draw upon besides shocking and shaming the public it wishes to win over" (15). In *The Overstory*, Douglas Pavlicek's dedication to environmental causes and his bond with a banyan tree serve as therapeutic outlets for his trauma. Douglas's transformation begins when he witnesses the destructive logging practices and decides to dedicate his life to planting trees. His journey exemplifies the idea that personal healing and environmental activism can go hand-in-hand, demonstrating the power of positive engagement with nature rather than using shame as a motivator. Nicholas Hoel's transformation into an environmental activist is rooted in his connection to his family's chestnut tree. His bond is exemplified when he joins the Redwood protests, standing firm on the branches of Mimas, an ancient tree, to protect it from being cut down. During his time in the tree, Nicholas reflects on the continuity and resilience of nature, drawing strength from this connection. After the protests, Nicholas channels his passion into creating public murals that raise awareness about the plight of trees and the environment. His art aims to inspire others to appreciate and protect the natural world. Mimi Ma's journey toward environmental activism is rooted in her connection to her father and the natural world. After her father's suicide, Mimi suffers from depression. She finds solace among the pine trees near her office, using her lunch breaks to seek refuge there. Her bond with nature, reinforced by emotional ties to her father, plays a

significant role in shaping her environmental activism. Mimi's transformation into an environmental advocate is shaped by her witnessing the destruction of the pine forests she finds solace in. The moment of realization propels Mimi into activism, illustrating how deeply personal connections to nature can inspire meaningful environmental advocacy. Her journey into activism is further solidified during her first protest alongside Douglas, where she witnesses the rampant destruction of ancient trees.

Olivia Vandergriff's transformation from a young woman struggling with alcoholism to a passionate environmental activist marks the redemptive power of nature. Initially described as reckless and disconnected, Olivia's life is marked by indulgence in transient pleasures. However, a turn occurs when she accidentally electrocutes herself, an event that alters her perception and relationship with the world around her. The shift in Olivia's character signifies the awakening of her environmental consciousness, leading her towards a path of activism. Motivated by these visions, Olivia discards her reckless behaviors and is driven westward by a newfound purpose. Her conviction deepens upon witnessing activists defending redwoods on TV which marks the beginning of Olivia's commitment to environmental activism, specifically the protection of old-growth forests. Her resolve to defend ancient redwoods from logging illustrates the deep bond between humans and nature, underscoring the pressing imperative to conserve it. In other words, Douglas Pavlicek, Nicholas Hoel, Mimi Ma, and Olivia Vandergriff undergo personal transformations through their deep connections to nature, which ultimately drive their environmental activism. The narratives demonstrate how the healing power of nature fosters personal recovery and inspires environmental activism, reinforcing Roszak's assertion that positive engagement with the natural world can motivate ecological stewardship. Nemeth elaborates that "ecopsychology focuses on the relationship between humanity, the environment, and nature" and highlights that engaging with nature is not only therapeutic but essential for understanding the ecological responsibilities (221).

In *Bewilderment*, Robin's connection with nature serves as a therapeutic and transformative force in his life because ecopsychology advocates for nature as a therapeutic tool that emphasizes interconnectedness and holistic well-being (Tudor 316). His experiences in nature becomes important in shaping his identity, his actions,

and his perspectives on the world around him. Robin's interactions with the natural world are not just recreational but essential to his identity and mental health, illustrating his biophilia. For example, Robin finds solitude in the natural environment, which becomes evident during their getaway to the Smoky Mountains, where his engagement with the surroundings plays a role in soothing his worries and moderating his moods. Another example is Robin's detailed observation and sketching of the natural world. A moment of connection with nature is depicted when Robin lies on the grass, observing the stars and feeling a sense of awakening and immersion in the environment, further illustrating the influence of the natural world on his perception and self-awareness.

Conversely, the degradation of nature and its impact on human mental health is another theme in Powers' works. Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly's story is an example of how bad environmental conditions can affect mental health. Initially, Ray and Dorothy are depicted as largely disconnected from nature, unable to distinguish an oak from a linden. Their lives take a turn when Ray suffers a brain injury, which leads them to engage deeply with their environment. The shift is marked by their dedication to the "Brinkman Woodlands Restoration Project," where they transform their backyard into a thriving ecosystem, combating the mental and emotional strain caused by Ray's condition and their previous disconnection from nature. On the other hand, Robin's connection to nature is personal. His emotional responses to environmental degradation, from grief over species extinction to anger at pollution, highlight the psychological toll of ecological crises. His reactions to environmental crises range from sadness to intense anger, highlighting the personal impact of ecological destruction. His distress over learning that over two thousand North American species are threatened or endangered deeply affects his emotional state, reflecting how his identity and emotional well-being are intertwined with the health of the environment. Robin's sensitivity to the natural world also leads to anxiety and stress, especially when he perceives the irreversible damage caused by human activities. His engagement with environmental activism and his understanding of the ecological crisis underline the gravity of the situation and the need for immediate action. To illustrate, Robin is disturbed by the pollution of rivers and the impact of chemicals on wildlife, expressing his frustration and anger towards those responsible for these environmental harms.

In this regard, the consequences of environmental problems are becoming more evident with each passing day. Environmental literature can become an efficient tool in raising awareness and can be enhanced by ecocriticism to emphasize the literary aspects of environmental crises, thereby addressing concerns about environmental issues. For instance, characters in Richard Powers' novels initially have distant relationships with the environment, which later become closer. By depicting these evolving relationships, Powers helps readers connect with his characters, making it easier for them to understand and relate to environmental issues. Both novels present a variety of characters, from ordinary people who are initially disconnected from the environment but later join protests, to a 9-year-old boy making personal efforts to protect nature. Their stories illustrate how environmental awareness can grow in individuals. Moreover, ecocriticism combines fiction with scientific facts, making complex environmental issues more accessible to the general public. As awareness continues to rise, literature is likely to play an even more solution-oriented role in contributing to greater efforts in solving environmental problems. However, the challenge lies in not overwhelming readers with too much information or technical terms. To clarify, while literature, especially nature writing or ecocriticism, can increase awareness, it is essential for these works to also guide people on how to utilize this heightened awareness effectively. By doing so, literary works can not only inform but also move individuals to take action towards environmental sustainability.

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## APPENDIX1. ORIGINALITY REPORT

	<b>HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ</b> <b>SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ</b>	Doküman Kodu Form No.	FRM-YL-15
		Yayın Tarihi Date of Pub.	04.12.2023
	<b>FRM-YL-15</b> <b>Yüksek Lisans Tezi Orijinallik Raporu</b> <i>Master's Thesis Dissertation Originality Report</i>	Revizyon No Rev. No.	02
		Revizyon Tarihi Rev.Date	25.01.2024

**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA**

Tarih:28/06/2024

Tez Başlığı: Doğada İyileşmek: Richard Powers'ın *The Overstory* (2018) ve *Bewilderment* (2021) Romanlarında Ekopsikoloji

Yukarıda başlığı verilen tezimin a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 133 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 28/06/2024 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 6 'dır.

Uygulanan filtrelemeler\*:

1.  Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç
2.  Kaynakça hariç
3.  Alıntılar hariç
4.  Alıntılar dâhil
5.  5 kelimedenden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tezimin herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumlarda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

Elifsu SAÇBÜKEN

<b>Öğrenci Bilgileri</b>	<b>Ad-Soyad</b>	ELİFSU SAÇBÜKEN
	<b>Öğrenci No</b>	N21138294
	<b>Enstitü Anabilim Dalı</b>	AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI
	<b>Programı</b>	AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI

**DANIŞMAN ONAYI**

UYGUNDUR.  
(Unvan, Ad Soyad, İmza)

\* Tez **Almanca** veya **Fransızca** yazılıyor ise bu kısımda tez başlığı **Tez Yazım Dilinde** yazılmalıdır.

\*\*Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları İkinci bölüm madde (4)/3'te de belirtildiği üzere: Kaynakça hariç, Alıntılar hariç/dahil, 5 kelimedenden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç (Limit match size to 5 words) filtreleme yapılmalıdır.



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		Revizyon Tarihi Rev.Date	25.01.2024

**TO HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY**  
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE**

Date:28/06/2024

Thesis Title (In English): Healing in Nature: Ecopsychology in Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) and Bewilderment (2021)

According to the originality report obtained by myself/my thesis advisor by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options checked below on 28/06/2024 for the total of 133 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled above, the similarity index of my thesis is 6%.

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Kindly submitted for the necessary actions.

Elifsu SAÇBÜKEN

<b>Student Information</b>	<b>Name-Surname</b>	ELIFSU SAÇBÜKEN
	<b>Student Number</b>	N21138294
	<b>Department</b>	AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE
	<b>Programme</b>	AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

**SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL**

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		Yayın Tarihi Date of Pub.	22.11.2023
	<b>FRM-YL-09</b> <b>Yüksek Lisans Tezi Etik Kurul Muafiyeti Formu</b> <i>Ethics Board Form for Master's Thesis</i>	Revizyon No Rev. No.	02
		Revizyon Tarihi Rev.Date	25.01.2024

<b>HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ</b> <b>SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ</b> <b>AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA</b>	
Tarih: 28/06/2024	
Tez Başlığı (Türkçe): Doğada İyileşmek: Richard Powers'ın <i>The Overstory</i> (2018) ve <i>Bewilderment</i> (2021) Romanlarında Ekopsikoloji	
Yukarıda başlığı verilen tez çalışmam:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır.</li> <li>2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.</li> <li>3. Beden bütünlüğüne veya ruh sağlığına müdahale içermemektedir.</li> <li>4. Anket, ölçek (test), mülakat, odak grup çalışması, gözlem, deney, görüşme gibi teknikler kullanılarak katılımcılardan veri toplanmasını gerektiren nitel ya da nicel yaklaşımlarla yürütülen araştırmaya niteliğinde değildir.</li> <li>5. Diğer kişi ve kurumlardan temin edilen veri kullanımını (kitap, belge vs.) gerektirmektedir. Ancak bu kullanım, diğer kişi ve kurumların izin verdiği ölçüde Kişisel Bilgilerin Korunması Kanuna riayet edilerek gerçekleştirilecektir.</li> </ol>	
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Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.	
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<b>Öğrenci Bilgileri</b>	Ad-Soyad	ELİFSU SAÇBÜKEN
	Öğrenci No	N21138294
	Enstitü Anabilim Dalı	AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI
	Programı	AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI

**DANIŞMAN ONAYI**

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	<b>HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ</b> <b>SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ</b>	Doküman Kodu Form No.	FRM-YL-09
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**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY**  
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ThesisTitle (In English): Healing in Nature: Ecopsychology in Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) and Bewilderment (2021)

My thesis work with the title given above:

- Does not perform experimentation on people or animals.
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**SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL**

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