

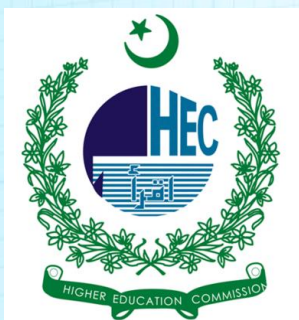
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**Beyond Anthropocentrism: Dwelling, Apocalypse, Wilderness,
and Nonhuman Agency in Richard Powers' The Overstory**



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Abstract

This article examines how Richard Powers' *The Overstory* reconstructs the relationship between human beings and the natural world through Greg Garrard's ecocritical concepts of dwelling, apocalypse, wilderness, and animals or nonhuman life. The study responds to a critical gap in literary scholarship in which environmental themes are often discussed in broad terms without a closely specified conceptual frame and without a systematic mapping of those concepts across one primary text. A qualitative textual design was adopted, and the novel was read through close analysis supported by a structured coding dataset derived from the article outline and organized into thirty analytical units. Each unit identified narrative segment, character or focal emphasis, ecological issue, anthropocentric system under critique, ecocentric perspective, nonhuman element, narrative technique, and interpretive finding. Descriptive summaries were then developed from the coded units in order to clarify recurrent patterns without reducing the analysis to a statistical study. The findings show that apocalypse and dwelling operate as the dominant conceptual pair, while wilderness and nonhuman agency serve as concentrated sites of ethical intensification. The novel repeatedly turns forests from passive scenery into active presences, exposes anthropocentric institutions as forms of perceptual and moral failure, and reimagines home as coexistence rather than possession. The article argues that *The Overstory* does not merely depict environmental crisis. It reorganizes scale, attention, memory, and obligation in ways that promote an ecocentric understanding of human-nature relations. Through Garrard's framework, the novel emerges as a sustained literary response to ecological devastation and as an imaginative model for environmental ethics grounded in attentiveness, interdependence, and shared planetary accountability.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Richard Powers, *The Overstory*, Greg Garrard, environmental crisis, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, nonhuman agency

1. Introduction

Ecocriticism has become one of the most influential approaches for examining how literature participates in environmental thought, ethical reflection, and cultural debate

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about the nonhuman world. From its early articulation as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment to later work on environmental justice, materiality, scale, and multispecies life, the field has encouraged critics to treat ecological representation as an aesthetic issue and as a question of cultural responsibility (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). This critical tradition is especially valuable in a period marked by climate anxiety, biodiversity decline, extractive economies, and widening awareness that human systems are entangled with processes far larger than themselves. Literary texts do not supply policy solutions in any simple way, yet they shape perception, moral vocabulary, and imaginative possibility. They can alter what readers notice, what forms of damage become legible, and what kinds of relation appear worth defending (Garrard, 2012).

Within this critical landscape, Richard Powers' *The Overstory* occupies a distinctive place because it brings the environmental novel into an unusually ambitious formal and ethical register. The novel interweaves several storylines, extends attention across human and arboreal timescales, and presents trees, forests, and ecological systems as central presences rather than decorative scenery (Powers, 2018). Its botanical architecture of roots, trunk, crown, and seeds creates a narrative pattern that invites readers to think in terms of growth, branching, succession, and dispersed relation. Human lives are shown as embedded in much older and wider processes of continuity. Such a structure enables the novel to address environmental destruction without flattening characters into mere vehicles of argument. The text remains emotionally complex while steadily displacing the assumption that human desires are the natural center of narrative value.

The power of *The Overstory* lies in the way it challenges anthropocentrism without relying on a single mode of ecological statement. At one level, the novel exposes deforestation, habitat destruction, institutional inertia, and public indifference. At another level, it reorganizes attention itself. Characters learn to see forests as communities, as repositories of memory, and as systems whose destruction cannot be understood through short-term human utility. This double movement is central to the present study. The novel does not simply announce that environmental crisis exists. It teaches readers how to perceive the crisis and how to recognize the moral inadequacy of categories that treat nonhuman life as mute or disposable (Heise, 2008).

A recurrent limitation in environmental literary criticism is that ecological themes are often discussed in expansive terms without a clearly specified analytical model. Critics may identify concern for species loss, climate anxiety, or ecological grief, yet they do not always show how a particular ecocritical framework organizes those concerns within the structure of a single primary text. When theory remains loosely attached, interpretation risks becoming thematic description rather than sustained literary argument. Greg Garrard's ecocriticism offers a productive corrective because it approaches environmental representation through recurring conceptual formations such as wilderness, dwelling, apocalypse, and animals. These terms do not function as neutral labels. Each one carries a history of ideological struggle and ethical implication, which makes the framework well suited for a disciplined reading of Powers' novel (Garrard, 2012).

The present article addresses this gap by analyzing *The Overstory* through Garrard's ecocritical concepts while also using a structured qualitative coding dataset to organize the interpretation. The goal is not to reduce literature to numbers. The coding matrix serves as a scaffold for close reading by making visible the recurrence of conceptual patterns across narrative units, characters, symbolic motifs, and formal strategies. The method is especially useful for a long and braided novel whose ecological force accumulates across many episodes. Through this approach, the article investigates how the text responds to environmental crisis and how it promotes an ecocentric understanding of human-nature relations. The central claim advanced here is that *The Overstory* derives its ecocritical power from a sustained interaction between critique and reconstruction: it exposes anthropocentric systems as forms of blindness, and it rebuilds perception, habitation, and ethical attention so that human life is imagined within a shared biosphere rather than above it (Nixon, 2011).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ecocriticism and Environmental Literary Inquiry

The emergence of ecocriticism reshaped literary studies by directing attention toward the material world that literary representation had often treated as stable background. Glotfelty and Fromm gave the field one of its earliest institutional definitions by describing ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). That formulation carried an

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important challenge. It asked criticism to read landscapes, ecosystems, pollution, climate, and species relations not as decorative accessories to human meaning but as constitutive parts of textual significance. Lawrence Buell expanded this insight by showing that environmental imagination involves questions of scale, ethics, embodiment, place, and the conditions under which texts make the nonhuman world perceptible as something other than property or setting (Buell, 1995). His work remains foundational because it demonstrates that environmental representation is inseparable from the moral imagination that organizes perception in the first place.

Greg Garrard's intervention sharpened the field by presenting ecocriticism through recurring tropes rather than through a single doctrine (Garrard, 2012). Wilderness, pastoral, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and pollution are not simply thematic clusters; they are contested cultural forms that disclose how societies imagine and justify their relation to the environment. This structure is particularly valuable for literary analysis because it allows critics to move beyond a broad claim that a text is 'about nature.' It invites attention to the precise conceptual vocabulary through which ecological meanings are generated. A novel may invoke wilderness as purity, danger, frontier, or inhabited world. It may stage apocalypse as spectacle, warning, diagnosis, or moral pressure. It may imagine animals and other forms of life either as mute objects or as beings whose presence challenges human sovereignty. The flexibility of Garrard's model is one reason it remains highly effective for reading fiction in the Anthropocene (Garrard, 2012).

Subsequent developments in ecocritical thought broadened the field without cancelling its foundational concerns. Heise argued that environmental imagination must address global interdependence and eco-cosmopolitan awareness rather than rely only on local attachment (Heise, 2008). Nixon's concept of slow violence showed that environmental damage often unfolds gradually, making it difficult to narrate because it is dispersed across time, geography, and social invisibility (Nixon, 2011). Material ecocriticism and related posthuman approaches then complicated the distinction between active human subjects and passive natural objects by drawing attention to storied matter, distributed agency, and the vitality of nonhuman processes (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014). These directions are deeply relevant to *The Overstory* because Powers constructs ecological meaning through interdependence, delayed damage, and

the demand to recognize agency beyond the human.

2.2 Garrard's Concepts as a Framework for Reading *The Overstory*

Wilderness, dwelling, apocalypse, and animals or nonhuman life provide the central conceptual grid for the present article. Wilderness is useful because it calls attention to the ideological history of spaces imagined as outside the human. Garrard emphasizes that wilderness discourse often contains myths of purity, frontier conquest, and untouched nature, which means it can conceal the violent histories through which land has been appropriated or emptied in imagination (Garrard, 2012). In a novel such as *The Overstory*, wilderness cannot be treated as a neutral scenic category. It must be read as a site where legal ownership, extraction, embodiment, and resistance are contested. The forest scenes of Powers' novel become significant not because they offer picturesque escape, but because they question who has the right to define the meaning and use of living ecosystems.

Dwelling shifts the analysis toward inhabitation, attachment, domestic scale, and the ethics of coexistence. In Garrard's account, dwelling concerns the possibility of living in place without converting place into an instrument of domination (Garrard, 2012). This concept is especially useful for a text in which ecological relation emerges through archives, households, migration, work, care, and remembrance rather than through abstract environmental declaration alone. *The Overstory* repeatedly asks what it means to be at home in a world composed of other beings with their own temporalities and forms of persistence. Dwelling, in this sense, does not signify comfort or ownership. It signifies relational accountability.

Apocalypse, another major concept in Garrard's framework, is often associated with catastrophe and terminal vision. In ecocritical reading, its value lies in showing how crisis narratives generate urgency, fear, revelation, and moral pressure (Garrard, 2012). Powers' novel makes extensive use of this conceptual field, though not in a simplistic manner. Environmental emergency appears through direct forest destruction, public delay, activist sacrifice, institutional denial, and the psychological burden of recognizing that ecological systems are under severe threat. Apocalypse in *The Overstory* is therefore not just an ending. It is a way of exposing the short-term thinking and perceptual failures that sustain destructive structures.

The concept of animals, expanded here into nonhuman life, enables the study to

consider agency, communication, species hierarchy, and the ethics of recognition. While Garrard's category attends to animals, its conceptual energy extends productively to Powers' representation of trees and forests because the novel persistently challenges the assumption that nonhuman beings are passive matter (Garrard, 2012). Work in material ecocriticism and vibrant materialism reinforces this extension by insisting that agency can be distributed across bodies, systems, and matter in ways that unsettle human exceptionalism (Bennett, 2010). This category is crucial for reading Patricia Westerford's scientific arc, the activist encounters with forests, and the novel's experiments with descriptive language that seek to make arboreal agency thinkable.

2.3 Scholarship on *The Overstory* and the Remaining Critical Gap

Recent scholarship confirms that *The Overstory* is one of the major environmental novels of the twenty-first century. Studies of anthropocentrism, environmental ethics, arboreal agency, and activist narrative have shown that Powers places the human within a much wider ecological frame (Mirza et al., 2024). Critics have emphasized that the novel contests human-centered values, highlights interdependence, and expands the imaginative status of trees from silent backdrop to active presence. This line of scholarship is important because it demonstrates that the novel's environmental commitments are not incidental. They are integral to the text's structure and to its understanding of history, memory, and moral obligation.

One strong strand in this scholarship concerns the representation of trees as agents. Birat argues that the novel experiments with narrative form in order to grant trees a kind of agency that conventional realist fiction often struggles to represent (Birat, 2024). Related work on collective agency and arboreal temporality has shown that Powers disrupts anthropocentric habits of scale by presenting trees as beings whose life rhythms exceed human expectations of speed, event, and drama (Dannenberg, 2021). These readings are valuable because they demonstrate that ecological ethics in the novel are inseparable from formal innovation. The challenge is not only to speak about forests but also to discover narrative structures capable of doing justice to their temporal and relational complexity.

Another strand of criticism focuses on environmental ethics and the politics of crisis. Studies have read *The Overstory* as an indictment of ecological destruction, a

meditation on activist commitment, and a text that exposes the violence of extractive capitalism (Ali, 2024). Such work often highlights the novel's critique of anthropocentrism and its insistence that human flourishing cannot be separated from the flourishing of nonhuman worlds. At the same time, some scholars have noted tensions in the novel's systems thinking, questioning whether its formal reliance on large networks risks echoing the abstractions of the very orders it criticizes (Vermeulen, 2023). This tension is worth preserving rather than smoothing away, because it shows that environmental fiction can remain internally conflicted even while advancing powerful ecological claims.

The present article enters this conversation by linking Garrard's concepts to a structured pattern analysis of the novel. Existing scholarship frequently privileges one line of emphasis, such as arboreal agency, activist ethics, environmental justice, or temporal scale. Fewer studies systematically map how those emphases are distributed across the architecture of the novel and how they interact through recurring narrative units, characters, and motifs. The coding dataset prepared for this study makes that mapping possible. It does not displace close reading. It strengthens it by showing where concepts cluster, which narrative segments carry the heaviest interpretive burden, and how the novel's ecological argument is built cumulatively rather than through isolated emblematic scenes. This is the specific critical space the article seeks to occupy.

3. Materials and Method

This study adopted a qualitative textual analysis design within the field of English literary studies. The primary text was Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, and the interpretive framework was Greg Garrard's ecocriticism, with emphasis on dwelling, apocalypse, wilderness, and nonhuman life. The aim of the method was to determine how the novel responds to environmental crisis and how it reconstructs the relationship between humanity and the natural world through narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, and descriptive strategy. Close reading functioned as the core analytical procedure, since the study was concerned with patterns of meaning, formal organization, and ethical implication rather than with empirical measurement. To organize the close reading with greater consistency, a qualitative coding dataset was developed from the research outline and then refined into thirty analytical units.

Each unit recorded the book part, narrative unit, character or focal emphasis, scene or episode, primary and secondary Garrard concepts, environmental issue, anthropocentric system under critique, ecocentric perspective, nonhuman element, narrative technique, symbol or motif, interpretive finding, and suggested analytical use. This coding matrix was designed to preserve literary nuance while creating an explicit structure for pattern identification. It allowed the study to move across the novel's multiple storylines without losing track of conceptual recurrence or formal distribution.

The procedure unfolded in four stages. The novel was read for global structure and for recurrent ecological motifs connected to forests, species hierarchy, deep time, ecological damage, and the ethics of attention. Relevant scenes and cross-cutting motifs were then converted into coded units. In the next stage, descriptive summaries were generated from the completed dataset, including frequencies of primary concepts, distribution across book parts, issue clusters, and selected heuristic scores for critique strength, ecocentric reorientation, activism intensity, and temporal depth. These summaries were interpretive aids rather than statistical findings in a positivist sense. They served to clarify emphasis and recurrence across the coded material. The final stage involved returning those patterns to sustained prose analysis in order to explain how the novel's ecocritical force is constructed.

This design was appropriate to the objective of the article because *The Overstory* is a long, braided novel whose environmental argument develops across dispersed lives and symbolic continuities. A purely impressionistic reading could identify its major ecological concerns, yet it might overlook how those concerns cluster within the architecture of the text. The use of a structured coding matrix addressed that risk. It enabled the analysis to describe not only what themes appear, but where they appear, how often they recur, and what kinds of narrative work they perform. The method therefore joined interpretive depth with analytical transparency while remaining fully within the logic of qualitative literary inquiry.

4. Results

4.1 Analytical Distribution of the Coding Corpus

The coding dataset consisted of 30 analytical units distributed across the four named parts of the novel and a fifth cross-cutting group developed for motifs that organize

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the text at a global level. This distribution is significant because it shows that the environmental argument of *The Overstory* is not concentrated in one dramatic cluster. Ecological meaning is seeded in introductory life histories, intensified in activist confrontation, carried through aftermath and institutional refusal, and gathered again in regenerative and synthetic motifs. Table 1 shows that *Roots* contains eight coded units, *Trunk* seven, *Crown* five, *Seeds* three, and the cross-cutting category seven. The spread indicates that Powers does not assign ecology to a marginal subplot. The novel's ecological imagination operates as a structural principle from beginning to end.

The descriptive pattern also reveals that the novel's architecture itself performs ecocritical work. *Roots* is the section where characters are formed through family memory, scientific observation, technological abstraction, domestic routine, migration, and altered perception. These are not neutral origin stories. They establish the conditions under which ecological awareness becomes possible or remains blocked. *Trunk* then converts those biographical formations into collective pressure by centering occupation, protest, science, conflict, and embodied risk. *Crown* concentrates on what remains after direct confrontation, including trauma, institutional deafness, urban detachment, and the question of intergenerational responsibility. *Seeds* condenses the novel's restorative and decentering impulses into a brief but symbolically charged closure. The cross-cutting category captures motifs such as climate anxiety, deforestation, attention, dwelling, and nonhuman agency that exceed any single section and help unify the novel's broad design.

Table 1: *Distribution of coded analytical units by novel segment.*

Novel Segment	Coded Units	Dominant Concept	Share (%)
Roots	8	Dwelling	26.7
Trunk	7	Apocalypse	23.3
Crown	5	Apocalypse	16.7
Seeds	3	Dwelling	10.0
Cross-cutting	7	Dwelling	23.3

Table 2: *Frequency distribution of primary Garrard concepts.*

Primary Garrard Concept	Frequency	Share (%)
Apocalypse	11	36.7
Dwelling	10	33.3

Animals/Nonhuman Life	6	20.0
Wilderness	3	10.0

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of primary Garrard concepts.

Figure 2. Garrard concepts across the narrative segments of the novel.

Primary concept frequencies sharpen this structural account. Table 2 and Figure 1 show that apocalypse appears in eleven coded units and dwelling in ten, while nonhuman life appears in six and wilderness in three. This ordering matters because it demonstrates that *The Overstory* is driven less by scenic celebration than by the interaction between ecological emergency and the search for an altered mode of inhabitation. The novel presents crisis as undeniable, yet it refuses to remain at the level of warning. Dwelling nearly matches apocalypse in frequency, which means that the text treats environmental response not only as recognition of danger but also as a redefinition of how human beings live among other forms of life. Nonhuman agency and wilderness remain decisive concepts, though they appear in more concentrated ways. Their lower frequency is best read as narrative precision rather than marginal importance.

Figure 2 locates these concepts within the architecture of the novel. Dwelling is strongest in *Roots*, where relation, memory, and belonging are being formed. Apocalypse dominates *Trunk* and remains intense in *Crown*, where direct action and institutional refusal make crisis unmistakable. *Seeds* returns the emphasis to dwelling, though by that stage home no longer signifies comfort, ownership, or enclosure. It signifies an ethically revised sense of coexistence after injury has already occurred. The cross-cutting group shows that apocalypse and dwelling continue to interact beyond local scenes. The novel therefore organizes its environmental vision through a durable tension: ecological damage is pervasive, yet the ethical response must move toward forms of care, attention, and habitation that do not reproduce the same logic of mastery.

The issue clusters generated from the coding matrix extend this argument. Forest loss and biodiversity damage, epistemic disconnection, crisis and precarity, mixed ecological pressure, and temporal or ethical scale all recur throughout the dataset. These clusters suggest that *The Overstory* understands environmental crisis as multi-layered. Damage is material, visible in logging, habitat destruction, and species

decline. Damage is also cognitive and cultural, visible in the inability of institutions and everyday habits to recognize nonhuman agency or ecological dependence. This dual structure is one of the most important findings of the study. Powers is not only narrating what is happening to forests. He is investigating the habits of thought and social organization that allow such destruction to appear ordinary.

From the standpoint of the article's objective, the distributional results already support an ecocentric reading. A novel that sustained environmental concern only at the level of theme might cluster its ecological force in a few emblematic scenes. The coding pattern here shows something broader. The Overstory ties ecological relation to family archives, scientific research, spiritual crisis, activism, media representation, domestic aging, urban abstraction, and symbolic regeneration. The ecological argument is therefore not detachable from the total shape of the narrative. It is the logic through which the novel arranges perception, pressure, and moral significance across its whole design.

4.2 Dwelling and the Reconstruction of Ecological Belonging

Dwelling emerges as one of the dominant concepts in the dataset, appearing in ten coded units and linking some of the most varied storylines in the novel. This range is itself revealing. Powers does not restrict ecological belonging to moments of wilderness encounter or activist struggle. He explores it through family memory, migration, domestic life, aging, intergenerational reflection, habitat loss, and the ethics of attention. Dwelling, then, names the novel's effort to redefine home. The coded units show that home is no longer presented as a human enclosure insulated from the rest of life. It becomes a relational condition in which human continuity depends on ecological continuity. This is the concept through which the novel most powerfully resists the possessive logic that often underlies anthropocentrism.

The chestnut archive associated with Nicholas Hoel is the clearest starting point. In the coding matrix, this narrative unit combines dwelling with wilderness and ties the episode to deforestation and the loss of long-lived tree communities. The anthropocentric system critiqued here is settler ownership logic joined to instrumental land use. The interpretive finding identifies the surviving tree as a witness that exceeds individual human lifespans and challenges human-centered historical scale. The importance of this result lies in the fact that memory is not stored primarily in a

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human archive. The tree itself preserves continuity. Human history becomes legible because an arboreal presence outlasts the generations who stand before it. Dwelling here is inseparable from dependence. The family belongs because the tree continues, not the other way around.

Douglas Pavlicek's trajectory extends dwelling into the terrain of labor, war, and repair. His coded unit links migration, labor, and observation to landscape degradation and institutional violence, with militarized and extractive systems identified as the target of critique. The ecocentric perspective reconstructed from this unit imagines home as ecological repair rather than domination. This shift matters because Douglas does not approach trees from the position of inherited pastoral innocence. He reaches ecological relation through survival and through contact with systems that have already damaged both land and bodies. Powers therefore refuses a simplistic opposition between corrupt history and pure nature. Dwelling becomes an act of re-situating oneself within living systems after one has already been shaped by violence, mobility, and institutional power.

Mimi Ma's coded unit shows a related but distinct pattern. Inheritance and cultural dislocation are tied to alienation from place and environmental precarity, while the anthropocentric system under critique is corporate and urban abstraction. The resulting ecocentric perspective suggests that belonging is rebuilt through relation to living environments. This finding is important because it reveals that dwelling in *The Overstory* is not a return to a stable origin. It is a difficult process of reattachment. Mimi's ecological movement occurs within modern urban conditions rather than outside them, and for that reason her storyline demonstrates that the ecological imagination of the novel is not anti-modern in any simplistic sense. It demands a rehumanization of place within the conditions of modern estrangement.

The domestic arc of Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly adds another layer to the concept. Their coded unit joins dwelling with nonhuman life and links their storyline to aging, mortality, and continuity. The anthropocentric system critiqued is the domestic routine ordered around human convenience, while the interpretive finding suggests that the household becomes legible as part of larger living cycles. This result is especially valuable because it shows that ecological awareness in the novel is not limited to spectacular confrontation. Ordinary life can also become

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ecologically significant when temporality slows and the household is re-seen as nested within seasonal, vegetal, and more-than-human continuities. Powers uses intimacy and aging to reveal that even the most private forms of human attachment are sustained by a larger world that exceeds them.

The coded unit on intergenerational ethics broadens this domestic insight to the level of narrative synthesis. It links dwelling to wilderness and identifies intergenerational environmental decline as the central issue. The target of critique is short-term developmental ideology. The interpretive finding indicates that responsibility expands toward future beings and ecosystems. The importance of this result lies in its challenge to human time preferences. Anthropocentric systems often privilege immediate gain over continuity, and the novel repeatedly exposes that preference as ethically inadequate. Dwelling, in this wider frame, means inhabiting time with those who are not yet present and with systems whose flourishing cannot be measured by immediate human benefit.

Seeds intensifies dwelling through the regeneration motif and the unit on memory stored in living systems. These episodes treat restoration after ecological damage and ecological amnesia as central issues. Developmental pressure and human archive systems centered on human events are the objects of critique. The ecocentric perspective that emerges is striking: hope is grounded in ecological processes rather than heroic human mastery, while trees function as repositories of planetary memory. This is one of the strongest indications that the novel does not seek redemption through triumphant human intervention. Regeneration remains possible, yet its basis lies in the persistence of life processes that exceed human will. Dwelling is therefore redefined as humility before continuities that humans can join but not command.

Table 3: *Environmental issue clusters represented in the coding matrix.*

Issue Cluster	Frequency	Indicative Focus
Mixed ecological pressure	9	Urban abstraction, technological distance, public distortion, institutional violence
Epistemic disconnection	8	Denial of plant agency, ecological neglect, language limits, human exceptionalism

Forest loss and biodiversity	6	Deforestation, logging, habitat loss, biodiversity decline
Crisis and precarity	4	Climate anxiety, imminent loss, spiritual and ecological crisis
Temporal and ethical scale	3	Aging, intergenerational decline, regeneration, continuity

Figure 3. Environmental issue clusters in the qualitative coding matrix.

The cross-cutting units on dwelling as coexistence, ethics of attention, and article thesis synthesis gather these dispersed movements into a clear pattern. Habitat loss, ecological neglect, and multiple interlinked ecological crises are shown as symptoms of anthropocentrism as an organizing worldview. Against this, the novel proposes that to dwell well means to inhabit without erasing other forms of life, that seeing the more-than-human world is an ethical practice, and that human beings are accountable participants in a shared biosphere. These findings reveal why dwelling is nearly as prominent as apocalypse in the dataset. The Overstory is not content to expose damage. It seeks to reconstruct the everyday conditions of relation that might resist further damage.

Table 3 clarifies this process by showing how dwelling intersects with issue clusters, while Figure 3 indicates that the strongest dwelling-related signals are tied to temporal depth and ecocentric reorientation. The pattern suggests that ecological belonging in the novel is built through repeated acts of re-scaling. Individual memory is placed within arboreal continuity, domestic intimacy within seasonal cycles, migration within landscapes of loss and repair, and human ethics within the future of ecosystems. The result is a deep revision of home. In a human-centered worldview, home is something humans possess and defend against the outside. In *The Overstory*, home is something humans enter only by acknowledging that they share it with lives they did not create and cannot legitimately erase.

This reconstruction of ecological belonging directly advances the objective of the study. By mapping dwelling across a large set of narrative units, the dataset shows that Powers promotes an ecocentric understanding of human-nature relations through habits of memory, care, and coexistence rather than through abstract environmental slogan alone. The novel teaches that belonging is not an entitlement secured by

human occupancy. It is a moral discipline of living within limits, across generations, and among other beings whose persistence gives meaning to human continuance itself.

4.3 Apocalypse and the Narrative of Environmental Emergency

Apocalypse is the most frequent primary concept in the coding matrix, appearing in eleven units. This dominance does not mean that *The Overstory* relies on simple disaster rhetoric. The coded patterns suggest something more complex: environmental emergency functions as a moral diagnostic that reveals the inadequacy of anthropocentric systems. Apocalypse in the novel names the pressure under which ordinary assumptions begin to fail. The forest is no longer scenery, delay no longer appears neutral, and institutions no longer seem merely procedural. Crisis makes visible what routine social life has normalized. The dataset therefore shows apocalypse not as an isolated climax, but as a recurrent interpretive force that runs from personal transformation to structural violence and collective precarity.

Olivia Vandergriff's storyline provides an early and decisive example. Her coded unit joins apocalypse with nonhuman life and identifies spiritual and ecological crisis as the central issue. The anthropocentric system critiqued is secular materialism that dismisses ecological reverence, while the ecocentric perspective recasts human identity through attentiveness to nonhuman presence. The interpretive finding states that personal crisis becomes the gateway to ecological consciousness. This result is significant because it shows apocalypse operating at the level of perception before it becomes a fully social or political pattern. A break in ordinary consciousness becomes a break in anthropocentric certainty. Olivia's altered awareness demonstrates that ecological emergency is also an epistemic event, one in which the meaning of the world changes before any institutional response arrives.

Neelay Mehta and Adam Appich deepen the apocalyptic pattern by locating crisis within technological and political systems. Neelay's coded unit links technological acceleration and distance from ecosystems to a critique of techno-solutionism and disembodied progress models. Adam's unit ties mass manipulation and political inertia around ecological collapse to media systems and behavioral governance. Taken together, these results show that apocalypse in the novel is not confined to visibly damaged forests. It also appears in modes of life that render ecological dependence abstract, substitutable, or administratively manageable. Powers

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uses these characters to ask whether modern systems of connectivity and explanation can become forms of disconnection when they treat material ecologies as background to human innovation and control.

The Trunk section pushes apocalypse into open confrontation. Civil disobedience and sacrifice, scale conflict, and media framing of protest are all coded under apocalypse, and each one identifies a different anthropocentric mechanism. State-corporate alliance and procedural delay, industrial forestry and market temporalities, and media sensationalism all appear as systems that block ecological accountability. The ecocentric perspectives attached to these units are equally revealing. Resistance is framed as proportional to the scale of emergency. Ecological value is said to exceed immediate human accounting. Environmental ethics are marginalized by human political narratives. These results show that apocalypse in *The Overstory* is inseparable from institutions that convert devastation into acceptable procedure or ideological noise.

The coded unit on scale conflict is especially important. It identifies short-term profit versus deep time as the environmental issue and industrial forestry with market temporalities as the system under critique. This formulation captures one of the novel's most persistent insights: ecological crisis is not only a matter of what humans do, but of the temporal logic through which they justify what they do. Forest life unfolds across durations that market systems compress or ignore. A tree community cannot be valued adequately within a calculus structured by immediate return, extraction schedules, and abstract ownership. Apocalypse, in this sense, emerges from a collision between the timescale of living systems and the impatience of institutions that refuse to think beyond the present transaction.

The coded units on media framing and public misunderstanding extend this argument by showing how ecological emergency is narratively mismanaged. Environmental action is translated into spectacle, extremism, or inconvenience, while the underlying violence of forest destruction is normalized. This pattern is crucial because it reveals that apocalypse in the novel is not only ecological but representational. The crisis persists partly because dominant narratives make it difficult to perceive proportionality. Radical destruction appears ordinary, and desperate defense appears irrational. Powers repeatedly exposes this inversion. The

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dataset supports that reading by clustering apocalypse around scenes where public language fails to register the stakes of ecological loss.

Crown continues the apocalyptic pattern in more interior and institutional forms. The coded units on aftermath of protest, institutional refusal, and urban and global disconnection identify climate anxiety, activist trauma, biodiversity collapse, and alienation from material ecologies as major issues. Systems that normalize destruction while isolating resisters, institutional inertia, and platform capitalism are presented as the objects of critique. These results show that environmental emergency in the novel does not end when a protest action ends. It lingers as moral exhaustion, social deafness, and intensifying detachment from the material world. Powers is therefore interested not only in spectacular crisis but also in the quieter forms of damage produced when institutions continue unchanged in the face of known ecological harm.

The cross-cutting units on deforestation as structural violence and climate anxiety and ruin make this diagnosis explicit. Deforestation is tied to industrial capitalism and extractive governance, while climate anxiety is linked to modern development detached from planetary limits. The interpretive findings are direct: narrative accumulation makes ecological violence morally visible, and fear becomes a sign of ecological knowledge rather than weakness. These conclusions matter because they challenge the tendency to privatize or pathologize environmental feeling. In *The Overstory*, anxiety can signal moral lucidity. It is an affective response to realities that institutions prefer to displace or discount. Apocalypse therefore functions as an ethical register as much as a narrative one.

Figure 4 strengthens this interpretation by showing that critique strength remains elevated across narrative segments even where activism intensity varies. The middle of the novel carries the highest level of embodied resistance, yet the pressure of ecological indictment does not disappear in the later sections. This pattern indicates that direct confrontation is only one form of apocalyptic expression. The novel sustains emergency through atmosphere, memory, structural repetition, and the persistence of unresolved harm. Such continuity is consistent with the coding results that connect apocalypse to both public conflict and inward burden.

The apocalyptic structure of the novel therefore supports the objective of the study in

a decisive way. The Overstory responds to environmental crisis by showing that ecological destruction is not a distant possibility but a present condition produced by human-centered values, institutions, and timescales. At the same time, it refuses to turn crisis into empty spectacle. Apocalypse becomes a way of revealing the social and perceptual arrangements that make damage possible. Readers are brought face to face with the fact that delay, procedural neutrality, and abstract progress can function as active modes of environmental violence.

The dataset makes clear that this concept is indispensable to an ecocentric reading of the novel. Human beings are not simply warned about impending doom. They are shown to inhabit systems whose ordinary operations already place them in ethically compromised relation to forests, species, and future life. Powers' apocalyptic vision is persuasive because it is never detached from lived structure. It is carried by bodies in trees, by scientific testimony ignored, by media narratives that trivialize urgency, and by the emotional residue that remains when destruction continues despite knowledge. Through this logic, the novel turns crisis into a demand for moral reorientation.

4.4 Wilderness beyond the Frontier Myth

Wilderness appears only three times as a primary concept in the dataset, which makes it the least frequent category. Yet its concentrated placement gives it exceptional interpretive weight. The coded units on forest occupation, embodied risk in the canopy, and wilderness redefined occur at moments where the novel most directly challenges inherited ideas of land as empty, ownable, or available for conquest. The relatively low frequency therefore signals narrative precision rather than conceptual weakness. Once the novel revises the meaning of wilderness, the ethical consequences of that revision spread into dwelling, apocalypse, and nonhuman agency. Wilderness operates as a hinge concept that helps dismantle the frontier logic often hidden inside human-centered environmental language.

The unit on forest occupation is central to this revision. It links wilderness to dwelling and identifies commercial logging and forest destruction as the immediate issue. Capitalist extraction and legal ownership of ecosystems are named as the anthropocentric systems under critique. The ecocentric perspective that emerges is striking: embodied solidarity with trees becomes an ethical mode of inhabiting the

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world. The significance of this result lies in the way it overturns the standard distance between observer and landscape. Wilderness is not a remote scene awaiting contemplation. It is a living world whose destruction places ethical demands on the human body. Powers moves wilderness out of the register of scenic appreciation and into that of moral relation.

Embodied risk in the canopy deepens this movement. Habitat destruction is the environmental issue, and profit logic that discounts nonhuman life is the system under critique. The interpretive finding suggests that the body becomes a medium through which nonhuman value is defended. This is one of the novel's most radical gestures. Human vulnerability is placed in direct relation to arboreal vulnerability, not to erase difference, but to demonstrate the extent of moral commitment required when institutions refuse to recognize ecological value. Wilderness here is inseparable from exposure. It becomes the place where the abstract claims of environmental ethics are tested against fear, discomfort, precarity, and the possibility of bodily loss.

The cross-cutting unit on wilderness redefined clarifies the conceptual stakes by identifying colonial frontier imagination itself as the object of critique. Wilderness is reconstructed as inhabited, communicative, and morally significant rather than empty, mute, or awaiting improvement. This result matters because it blocks a romantic misreading of *The Overstory*. Powers is not celebrating untouched land in a way that erases history or idealizes distance from human presence. He is challenging the forms of perception through which living ecosystems become legible as expendable territory. Once that ideological frame is broken, the forest can no longer be assimilated to property logic or developmental inevitability.

The placement of wilderness within *Trunk* and the cross-cutting synthesis is also meaningful. The concept becomes most visible when the novel is confronting direct ecological violence and the inadequacy of legal or commercial frameworks. In the opening sections, characters are still learning to see. In the later sections, the novel is gathering its ethical conclusions. Wilderness reaches peak force in the middle because this is where the conflict over meaning becomes explicit. Is the forest a resource, a legal asset, a backdrop to human action, or a world with its own integrity? The coded results show that Powers answers this question not by abstract statement but through bodily risk, protest, and conceptual reframing.

Viewed alongside the stronger frequencies of apocalypse and dwelling, the wilderness pattern becomes even more revealing. The novel does not ask readers to flee human history for pristine nature. It asks them to revise the assumptions through which land has been imagined as separable from relation, from memory, and from responsibility. Wilderness, once redefined, supports the article's broader claim that *The Overstory* promotes an ecocentric understanding of human-nature relations. The forest is no longer a stage for human meaning alone. It is a site of life, conflict, communication, and ethical consequence. That transformation is one of the central achievements of the novel's ecocritical imagination.

4.5 Animals, Nonhuman Life, and Arboreal Agency

The category of animals or nonhuman life appears in six coded units, and these units are among the most conceptually decisive in the entire dataset. They concern scientific awakening, communicating forests, multispecies community, language and representation, moral decentering, and nonhuman agency as a cross-cutting thesis. Taken together, they demonstrate that *The Overstory* does not merely defend forests as scenery or resource. It redistributes agency and asks whether literary narrative can make nonhuman life thinkable as active presence. This is a major reason the novel matters within ecocritical scholarship. It shifts the debate from environmental concern in the abstract to the representational and ethical problem of how other beings become legible in human discourse.

Patricia Westerford's scientific awakening provides the most direct illustration. Her coded unit identifies ecological interdependence ignored by dominant institutions as the major issue and critiques scientific gatekeeping together with narrow human utility models. The ecocentric perspective states that forest systems are communicative communities rather than mute resources. The interpretive finding extends that point by asserting that the novel legitimizes nonhuman agency through scientific reorientation. The significance of this pattern lies in the fact that science is not rejected. It is repositioned. Powers uses scientific inquiry to expose the limitations of knowledge systems that only value the nonhuman insofar as it serves immediate human benefit. Science becomes ecocritical when it listens instead of merely classifying.

The Trunk unit on trees as communicating beings intensifies this epistemic shift. It

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identifies the denial of plant agency as the issue and reductionist science centered on human benefit as the object of critique. The resulting ecocentric perspective grants nonhuman life a complexity that demands ethical reconsideration. This is an important step in the novel's argument because it converts biological relation into moral consequence. Once trees are understood as active participants in ecological life, the human right to treat them as inert material becomes ethically unstable. The forest ceases to be a collection of usable objects and becomes a network of beings whose own forms of interaction matter.

Community beyond species expands the issue from epistemology to social imagination. The dataset identifies species hierarchy and human exceptionalism as the systems being challenged, while the ecocentric perspective proposes belonging extended to multispecies community. This unit reveals that *The Overstory* is not satisfied with proving that trees communicate. It asks what follows from that knowledge. The answer is not a sentimental collapse of distinctions between species. The answer is an expanded idea of community. Human social life can no longer be imagined as self-sufficient if the conditions that sustain it depend upon relations with more-than-human systems that have their own vitality and significance.

The coded unit on language and representation shows that the problem is also formal. The environmental issue here is the limit of anthropocentric language, and the system under critique is human-centered discourse itself. The ecocentric perspective suggests that the text experiments with forms that approximate ecological perspective. This is a vital finding because it explains why the novel often feels stylistically unusual. Powers is attempting to stretch narrative language toward forms adequate to nonhuman life without pretending that human words can simply become tree consciousness. The effort is therefore both ambitious and self-critical. The novel seeks to represent agency beyond the human while keeping alive the difficulty of that task.

The unit on moral decentering makes the ethical stakes explicit. Anthropocentrism is the issue, human exceptionalism the target, and relational humility the ecocentric response. Here the dataset points to one of the most powerful motions in the novel: the human is not erased, but it is stripped of unquestioned supremacy. The interpretive pressure is not anti-human. It is anti-exclusive. Human beings must learn to think of themselves as participants in a network of dependence

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rather than as sovereign subjects standing over a passive world. This revision of scale and selfhood is one of the clearest ways in which the novel promotes ecocentrism.

The final cross-cutting unit on nonhuman agency gathers the previous findings into a concise thesis. Denial of plant agency is identified as the issue, human supremacy narratives as the system under critique, and the core ecocentric perspective is that the nonhuman world acts rather than merely receives action. The novelty of this result should not be understated. Conventional human-centered narrative often treats the environment as a setting that reacts only when humans touch it. Powers reverses that orientation. Trees and forests become active presences around which memory, science, feeling, activism, and imagination reorganize themselves. They are not props in a human moral drama. They are constitutive participants in the world that the novel asks readers to inhabit.

Figure 3 helps explain why nonhuman life intersects so strongly with the issue cluster of epistemic disconnection. The problem is not only that forests are harmed. It is also that dominant systems of knowledge, language, and social value prevent their agency from being recognized in the first place. This overlap means that ecological ethics in the novel depend on two connected tasks: revealing nonhuman vitality and exposing the habits of thought that conceal it. Powers performs both tasks repeatedly. Scientific narrative, descriptive innovation, and multispecies imagination all work to undo the perceptual habits that keep the more-than-human world in a subordinate conceptual position.

These results are central to the objective of the article. The Overstory promotes an ecocentric understanding of human-nature relations not only by condemning the destruction of forests but also by challenging the grammar through which action, value, and communication are assigned. Trees become presences with memory, complexity, and relational force. Human beings are asked to respond to them not as masters, but as co-inhabitants whose survival and moral maturity depend on acknowledging that life exceeds the human frame. In this sense, the novel does one of ecocriticism's most demanding kinds of work: it makes nonhuman life ethically consequential without reducing it to a simple mirror of human concerns.

4.6 Character Trajectories, Issue Clusters, and Ecocentric Reorientation

The dataset shows that ecocentric transformation in *The Overstory* is distributed

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across a wide range of characters, social positions, and emotional histories. This diversity is one of the clearest indicators that the novel is not advancing a narrow environmental lesson tailored to a single exemplary figure. Ecological awareness emerges through family memory, scientific labor, bodily accident, migration, domestic intimacy, digital abstraction, public manipulation, activism, trauma, and symbolic reflection. Table 4 summarizes the major character trajectories and their corresponding ecocentric shifts. The pattern demonstrates that Powers constructs environmental relation as a plural process of decentering rather than as a single revelation repeated from one storyline to another.

Table 4: *Character trajectories and ecocentric shifts in The Overstory.*

Character/Focus	Initial Position	Ecocentric Shift	Analytical Result
Nicholas Hoel	Inherited family memory through the chestnut archive	Moves from private grief to public ecological witness	Arboreal continuity alters historical scale
Patricia Westerford	Scientific encounter with forest communication	Reframes trees as active beings rather than passive resources	Knowledge becomes an ethical invitation to listen
Olivia Vandergriff	Near-death experience and altered attention	Turns perception into radical ecological commitment	Personal crisis becomes ecological vocation
Douglas Pavlicek	Survival through a tree and later forest labor	Recasts belonging as repair rather than domination	Dwelling becomes coexistence
Mimi Ma	Urban alienation and inherited dislocation	Finds belonging through activism and ecological relation	Place is rebuilt through living systems

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Adam Appich	Behavioral analysis of mass manipulation	Recognizes political normalization of environmental collapse	Moral critique shifts from observation to implication
Ray and Dorothy	Domestic routine and aging	Household life opens into ecological temporality	Intimacy is rescaled by more-than-human cycles
Neelay Mehta	Technological genius shaped by arboreal accident	Embodies both networked possibility and abstraction from material ecologies	Digital connection remains ethically incomplete without ecological accountability

Nicholas Hoel's arc is grounded in inheritance. The chestnut archive trains him to perceive time through arboreal continuity rather than purely human eventfulness. His movement toward public ecological witness is therefore not a sudden conversion but an expansion of a memory structure that already binds his family to a nonhuman life form. Patricia Westerford's path is different. Her transformation passes through science, disbelief, and eventual recognition that knowledge itself can become a site of ecological struggle. Olivia Vandergriff's shift is more abrupt and experiential, beginning with altered perception after a near-death event. Douglas Pavlicek and Mimi Ma arrive through displacement, labor, and estrangement. Ray and Dorothy reach ecological significance through aging and domestic duration. Adam Appich encounters the problem through systems of persuasion and social manipulation. Neelay Mehta occupies the unresolved zone where technological networking resembles ecological connectedness while remaining distant from material reciprocity.

These trajectories reveal that the novel's ecocentrism is not doctrinal. No single path to ecological awareness is privileged as universally normative. This matters because environmental literature can sometimes lapse into a predictable pattern in

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which the already sensitive or spiritually awakened character becomes the sole carrier of ecological insight. Powers resists that simplification. He allows awareness to emerge through trauma, research, routine, love, frustration, and failure. The effect is to broaden the ethical reach of the novel. Ecocentric reorientation appears not as the property of a rare heroic temperament, but as a possibility latent within many forms of human experience once anthropocentric assumptions begin to loosen.

The issue clusters in Table 3 reinforce this diversity. Forest loss and biodiversity damage account for the most visible material harm. Epistemic disconnection captures the repeated inability of institutions and dominant discourse to recognize interdependence or nonhuman agency. Crisis and precarity register the emotional and structural pressure of ecological emergency. Mixed ecological pressure captures the conjunction of technological abstraction, urban alienation, and systemic violence. Temporal and ethical scale gathers the motifs of aging, continuity, intergenerational decline, and regeneration. The value of this clustering lies in its demonstration that the novel does not isolate environmental crisis as a single kind of problem. It presents the crisis as material, perceptual, affective, temporal, and moral all at once.

The strongest ecocentric shifts occur where issue clusters overlap. Patricia's storyline, for instance, combines epistemic disconnection with nonhuman agency. Olivia and Nicholas combine crisis, wilderness, and embodied activism. Ray and Dorothy join temporal scale to dwelling. Neelay and Adam reveal the conjunction of abstraction, technological mediation, and ecological misalignment. In each case, transformation occurs because a human storyline collides with something that exceeds established human measures of value. The dataset therefore shows that ecocentric reorientation is triggered not by environmental sentiment alone, but by pressure points where perception, structure, and moral demand intersect.

Figure 4. Secondary analytic scores by narrative segment.

Figure 4 supports this conclusion through the heuristic scores assigned to narrative segments. Reorientation strength remains high throughout the novel, even where activism intensity rises or falls. Roots develops strong reorientation through memory, science, and altered perception. Trunk combines the highest activism intensity with very strong critique and reorientation. Crown shows that critique remains intense even

after direct collective action has fractured. Seeds carries some of the highest scores for temporal depth and reorientation, which suggests that the novel's closing movement is not merely decorative or hopeful in a vague sense. It consolidates the ethical lessons developed across the preceding narrative pressure.

A closer look at individual trajectories clarifies the novel's range of ecological pedagogy. Nicholas embodies the movement from memory to witness. Patricia embodies the movement from explanation to listening. Olivia embodies the movement from personal rupture to radical vocation. Douglas and Mimi embody the movement from displacement to relational belonging. Ray and Dorothy embody the movement from domestic routine to ecological temporality. Adam embodies the movement from analysis of manipulation to recognition of collective moral failure. Neelay embodies the unresolved question of whether digitally networked thinking can produce ecological responsibility without direct participation in material systems of life. The dataset is valuable here because it shows that these movements are not random. They repeatedly direct characters away from human exclusivity and toward forms of dependence, humility, and shared vulnerability.

The article's objective is therefore strongly supported by character-based evidence. The Overstory does not promote ecocentrism through abstract thesis statement alone. It stages ecocentric reorientation as a lived revision of selfhood. Characters discover that human identity becomes thinner, not richer, when it refuses relation to trees, forests, and larger ecological continuities. The novel's success lies in turning environmental thought into narrative experience. Readers watch characters lose the illusion of separateness and enter more demanding forms of belonging. That process gives the novel its ethical force and explains why it remains persuasive even where activism within the story does not produce immediate worldly victory.

4.7 Narrative Technique, Temporal Scale, and the Synthetic Ecocritical Pattern

The results of the coding matrix confirm that the ecocritical force of *The Overstory* is inseparable from its formal design. Table 5 lists the narrative techniques attached to the coded units, including generational framing, scientific discourse, transformative character events, biographical layering, psychological interiority, slow temporal narration, embodied activism, conflict scenes, social commentary, braided narrative accumulation, metaphoric decentering, archive metaphor, motif repetition, symbolic

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closure, and synthetic interpretation. The diversity of this list shows that Powers does not depend on one formal device to carry ecological meaning. He constructs environmental significance through many interlocking techniques that alter scale, connect dispersed lives, and make nonhuman continuity available to narrative thought.

Table 5: *Narrative technique categories and their ecocritical functions.*

Technique Category	Frequency	Ecocritical Function
Structural braiding and synthesis	5	Links dispersed lives and motifs into a shared ecological field
Temporal scaling	4	Extends memory and responsibility beyond immediate human time
Representational experimentation	4	Tests language and imagery against nonhuman complexity
Reflective and interior narration	4	Turns inward awareness into ecological self-questioning
Conflict and pressure building	3	Makes environmental emergency visible as structural confrontation
Contrastive systems framing	3	Sets human abstraction against ecological interdependence
Scientific and analytical framing	2	Repositions knowledge as a practice of listening to living systems
Embodied confrontation	2	Places ecological value on vulnerable bodies rather than abstract claims
Symbolic closure and regeneration	2	Reorients the ending toward succession,

Transformative focalization	1	humility, and continuity Uses personal rupture to open ecological consciousness
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Generational framing and archive metaphor are especially important because they reshape time. The chestnut archive, ancestral memory, and recurring tree imagery place human lives within durations that exceed ordinary narrative horizons. This temporal stretching is central to the novel's ecocentrism. Anthropocentric systems often privilege speed, event, and immediate utility. Powers counters that orientation by making long continuity aesthetically compelling. Trees become living archives, and human history begins to look brief, fragile, and dependent when viewed against arboreal persistence. The coding results therefore support the claim that temporal form is one of the novel's primary ethical instruments.

Braided narrative structure serves a related function at the level of social scale. Characters separated by geography, class, profession, age, and experience are gradually drawn into a pattern of ecological interdependence. The technique refuses the illusion that environmental crisis belongs to one specialized sector of life. It belongs to everyone, even when awareness and accountability are unevenly distributed. By weaving together many lives, the novel turns ecology into a condition of relation rather than a thematic compartment. The dataset's distribution across book parts and issue clusters confirms this. Forest loss, denial of plant agency, domestic continuity, technological abstraction, and activist urgency all become legible as parts of one larger ecological field.

Embodied activism and embodied symbolism bring this broad field into direct contact with the body. The canopy scenes, occupation sequences, and episodes of risk transform ethical commitment into physical exposure. This is an important result because it prevents the novel's systems thinking from remaining abstract. Ecological value is not only argued for; it is lived at the level of fear, fatigue, bodily endurance, and vulnerability. The body becomes the site where the distance between human and forest is radically narrowed. This formal move helps explain the intensity of the Trunk section in the dataset. Crisis becomes most powerful when it is literally inhabited.

Language itself becomes a formal site of ecocritical struggle. The units attached to

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metaphoric expansion, decentering, and the limits of anthropocentric discourse show that the novel repeatedly tests how far human language can move toward ecological perspective without collapsing nonhuman life into a human mirror. This is one of the most sophisticated aspects of Powers' craft. The text is aware that representation can become another form of appropriation if it simply turns trees into disguised people. At the same time, silence would leave the nonhuman in the old conceptual position of passive matter. The novel navigates this tension by stretching syntax, metaphor, and descriptive rhythm toward relation rather than sameness.

The closing movement of the novel is also formally significant. Symbolic closure, regeneration motif, and the synthetic units gathered in *Seeds* and the cross-cutting category show that the narrative does not conclude by restoring human mastery or by dissolving crisis into simple hope. Instead, it offers a humbler kind of continuation. Life persists through succession, memory, and forms of agency that are not controlled by the human protagonists. This result is consistent with the high temporal-depth score assigned to *Seeds* in Figure 4. The ending is ecocentric because it places the human future within ecological process rather than above it.

Table 6: *Synthetic movement from perception to confrontation to reorientation.*

Analytical Stage	Dominant Processes	Where Visible	Most	Interpretive Meaning
Perception	Seeing, listening, remembering, and noticing	Roots and selected cutting units	and cross-	Weakens human exceptionalism by exposing ecological interdependence
Confrontation	Protest, conflict, institutional refusal, public distortion	Trunk and Crown	and	Shows that environmental crisis is structural rather than accidental
Reorientation	Coexistence, humility, regeneration, and shared-biosphere	Seeds and cutting units	and cross-	Promotes an ecocentric ethic grounded in responsibility rather

Table 6 summarizes the synthetic pattern of the novel as a movement from perception to confrontation to reorientation. In the stage of perception, characters and readers learn to notice nonhuman continuity, communication, and memory. In confrontation, ecological destruction becomes visible as structural violence maintained by ownership regimes, extractive profit, institutional inertia, and ideological framing. In reorientation, the novel rebuilds the possibility of coexistence through humility, attention, regeneration, and shared-biosphere ethics. This three-stage synthesis does not flatten the novel's complexity. It captures the dominant movement by which the coded units relate to one another across the narrative architecture.

The final result of the study can therefore be stated with confidence. The Overstory achieves ecocritical power not because it includes environmental content, but because its entire design redistributes agency, slows time, braids lives, and compels readers to inhabit the limits of anthropocentric thought. The structured dataset makes that design visible. Concept frequencies, issue clusters, character trajectories, and formal techniques all point toward the same conclusion: the novel responds to environmental crisis by altering what counts as central, what counts as alive, and what counts as a meaningful future. This is the deepest sense in which the novel promotes an ecocentric understanding of human-nature relations.

Taken together, the results section demonstrates that the coding matrix was not a peripheral device. It was an interpretive tool that clarified the cumulative coherence of the text. By showing where concepts cluster and how motifs travel across the novel's parts, the matrix confirms that Powers' environmental imagination is structurally disciplined. The forest is not a thematic ornament; it is the force around which memory, crisis, belonging, language, and ethics are reorganized. The article's objective is met because the results consistently show that The Overstory resists anthropocentrism and reconstructs the relationship between humanity and the natural world on explicitly ecocentric terms.

5. Discussion

The findings show that Garrard's concepts do more than provide a convenient vocabulary for themes already visible in The Overstory. They reveal the architecture through which the novel organizes environmental meaning. The dominance of

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apocalypse and dwelling demonstrates that Powers does not frame ecological crisis as a matter of external disaster alone. He joins environmental emergency to questions of habitation, memory, time, and moral scale, which is precisely the kind of work ecocriticism has long identified as central to environmental literature (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). The results also confirm Buell's argument that environmental imagination cannot be reduced to scenic description. Forests in the novel matter not as picturesque settings, but as temporal structures, ethical claims, and conditions of intelligibility that reshape how readers understand human history and obligation (Buell, 1995).

The strong presence of dwelling in the dataset extends this ecocritical conversation in an important direction. A great deal of environmental criticism has understandably focused on damage, extraction, and crisis. The present study confirms the necessity of that emphasis, given the prominence of apocalypse in the coding matrix. Yet the near-equal force of dwelling suggests that *The Overstory* insists on a second task: rebuilding the terms of inhabitation after the exposure of anthropocentric violence. Garrard's concept of dwelling helps clarify that the novel is not content with warning its audience. It seeks to reimagine how humans live in relation to other beings, how memory is stored, how domestic life is scaled, and how responsibility extends across generations (Garrard, 2012). This finding also resonates with Heise's insistence that environmental imagination must register complex forms of relation that exceed narrow localism while still remaining ethically grounded (Heise, 2008).

The apocalyptic results align strongly with Nixon's account of slow violence. The coding matrix repeatedly showed that crisis in *The Overstory* is structural, cumulative, and frequently normalized by institutions whose procedures make destruction appear ordinary (Nixon, 2011). Deforestation, habitat loss, biodiversity decline, climate anxiety, and public misrecognition are not treated as isolated shocks. They are sustained through ownership regimes, market time, media framing, and developmental assumptions that detach human aspiration from planetary limits. Powers' contribution lies in his ability to make this dispersed violence narratively legible. The braided structure allows the novel to accumulate evidence across many lives until the moral pattern becomes impossible to ignore. In that sense, the novel performs a crucial ecocritical function: it gives shape and emotional force to harms

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that dominant systems often render abstract or administratively invisible (Nixon, 2011).

The findings concerning nonhuman life and agency place the novel in productive dialogue with material ecocriticism and vibrant materialist thought. Iovino and Oppermann argue that matter can be understood as storied, active, and entangled with human semiosis, while Bennett describes a politics attentive to the vitality of nonhuman processes (Bennett, 2010). *The Overstory* resonates with these arguments by repeatedly granting forests communicative, temporal, and ethical significance. At the same time, the results show that Powers remains alert to the representational difficulty involved in this gesture. The novel experiments with language in order to avoid treating trees as either inert matter or easy human doubles. This tension gives the text much of its seriousness. It seeks a form of relation that honors agency without erasing alterity.

The study also clarifies the contribution and limits of recent scholarship on *The Overstory*. Work on anthropocentrism, environmental ethics, arboreal agency, and activist narrative has rightly emphasized the novel's challenge to human-centered values and its capacity to expand ecological awareness (Nguyen, 2022). The present article confirms those insights, especially in its mapping of apocalypse, dwelling, and nonhuman agency across the novel's structure. At the same time, the results also preserve the tension noted by critics who read the novel in relation to systems thinking and neoliberal abstraction (Vermeulen, 2023). Neelay's storyline, the novel's fascination with networks, and its large-scale architecture all show that ecological fiction can borrow the language of systems in ways that invite ambivalence. What the dataset clarifies is that the dominant movement of *The Overstory* remains toward humility, accountability, and critique of extractive value. The tension is present, yet it does not displace the novel's central ecocentric force.

Methodologically, the article demonstrates that a structured qualitative dataset can enrich literary criticism without reducing it to quantitative simplification. The frequencies, clusters, and heuristic scores used in the Results section were interpretive aids, not empirical claims independent of reading. Their value lay in making recurrence visible across a large and braided text. This proved especially useful for showing that ecocentric reorientation in *The Overstory* is not confined to overt protest

scenes. It is distributed across archives, households, scientific episodes, language experiments, symbolic closures, and cross-cutting motifs of attention and coexistence. Such an approach may be useful for future ecocritical studies of long novels where pattern distribution matters as much as local textual intensity.

Taken together, the findings suggest that literature can respond to environmental crisis most powerfully when it changes the terms of relation rather than merely adding environmental content to an otherwise unchanged narrative model. The *Overstory* does not solve ecological devastation at the level of plot. Its activism is costly, partial, and frequently defeated. Its deepest achievement lies elsewhere. It reorganizes moral scale. It moves readers from mastery to coexistence, from isolated human drama to shared biospheric vulnerability, and from environmental concern as thematic backdrop to ecology as the condition of narrative and ethical thought itself (Dannenberg, 2021). Through Garrard's framework, the novel emerges as a major ecocritical work because it compels readers to imagine what human belonging might mean once the fantasy of human centrality is surrendered.

6. Conclusion

This article analyzed Richard Powers' *The Overstory* through Greg Garrard's ecocritical concepts in order to determine how the novel responds to environmental crisis and promotes an ecocentric understanding of human-nature relations. The structured coding dataset and the close reading developed from it show that the novel's environmental vision is coherent across its full architecture. Apocalypse and dwelling form the dominant conceptual pair, while wilderness and nonhuman life provide concentrated moments of ethical intensification. Together, these patterns demonstrate that the novel does not merely describe ecological damage. It reorganizes scale, perception, memory, and moral obligation so that the human can no longer be imagined as sovereign over the world it inhabits.

The study found that *The Overstory* persistently critiques extractive capitalism, institutional inertia, media distortion, property-centered space, narrow utility models, and human exceptionalism. At the same time, it builds an alternative moral vision through arboreal memory, multispecies relation, humility, attention, and regeneration. Character trajectories, issue clusters, and formal techniques all point toward the same conclusion: the novel reconstructs home as coexistence and converts environmental

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crisis into a demand for ethical reorientation. The coding matrix strengthened that conclusion by showing how concepts and motifs recur across the novel rather than appearing in isolated symbolic scenes.

The Overstory therefore emerges as a literary response to environmental crisis that is diagnostic and reconstructive at once. It diagnoses the violence of anthropocentric thought, and it reconstructs the possibility of dwelling within a damaged yet still living world. For ecocritical scholarship, the novel remains a powerful site for thinking about environmental ethics, nonhuman agency, deep time, and the future of human belonging on a shared planet. The qualitative dataset used in this article also suggests a practical path for future literary studies that seek analytical transparency while preserving interpretive depth.

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