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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Positioning agrarianism as a sustainable environmental discourse: Culture, nature and place

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Abstract – This paper examines the concept of agrarianism as a counterpoint to anthropocentric environmental perspectives, utilizing an ecological reading of Richard Powers’ novel, “The Overstory.” Agrarianism challenges the prevailing notion that prioritizes human interests and exploits nature, emphasizing the interconnectedness and equal value of all beings within the natural world. Embracing agrarian principles such as sustainable practices and the significance of agriculture is seen as a more ethical and sustainable approach to human-environment interactions. Reading the novel highlights an agrarian perspective, underlines the need for sustainability, and advocates for a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and non-human entities. Agrarian principles, emphasizing rural living, sustainability and the value of agriculture, are positioned as a counter-discourse to modernity, especially its reliance on technology and scientific knowledge which detrimentally impact the environment. Compared to other discussions of agrarianism, the present study emphasizes the use of narrative strategies to heighten readers’ awareness of the intricate relationship between humans and nature, To conclude, this study seeks to foster critical reflection on environmental issues and promote awareness of alternative perspectives and environmental approaches by emphasizing the agrarian viewpoint in the novel and exploring its implications.

Keywords – agrarianism, American literature, ecocriticism, ethics of care

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INTRODUCTION

The term “Anthropocene,” coined by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen in 2002, recognizes the era when human activities profoundly impacted the natural environment. This concept emphasizes that advancements in science, technology, and material progress have caused irreversible transformations extending beyond human existence, making humanity a transformative force with profound implications for the planet (Caracciolo, 2023, p. 542). This concept acknowledges humans as a significant ecological force, fundamentally altering the world beyond their existence. Riordan (2007, p. 326) argues that the Anthropocene marks a new geological epoch where humanity emerges as a transformative species with far-reaching consequences, underscoring the significant role of scientific advancements, technological progress, and material development in permanently reshaping the environment. Dazzi and Lo Papa further address “how the most extensive changes of soil characteristics induced by humans are those affecting the topsoil as a result of activities

such as tillage, deforestation, liming, and irrigation” (2015, p. 4). These issues are interconnected by the common thread of environmental damage caused by modernity and the underlying anthropocentric views that prioritize human interests. This anthropocentric mindset justifies the exploitation and conquest of nature, leading to environmental degradation. To address the ecological crisis, Buell (1995, p. 4) suggests exploring alternative “environmental imagination,” one potential solution he proposes is embracing a more rural-based outlook in contemplating humanity’s relationship in the wider world. Buell’s idea expands the role of the humanities in fostering a more ethical perspective on how we perceive and interact with nature (2020b, p. 29)

Since the early 2000s, there has been a growing awareness that the environmental humanities can play a pivotal role in addressing the human-caused factors contributing to the current environmental crisis, mainly due to Anthropocentrism. Environmental humanities are multidisciplinary, ranging from various disciplines such as history, literary

studies, philosophy, film/media studies, aesthetics and religion, informed by the need for sustainability. The environmental humanities aim to prompt readers to consider how humanity, with its diverse intergenerational and multi-species makeup, can establish a meaningful connection between the human spirit and the Earth (Adamson, 2016, 2017). As Whyte (2018) articulated, environmental humanities focus on reanalyzing ancient/classical and modern texts to posit the rethinking of “human factor/anthropocentrism concerning social and ecological challenges. This reorientation of cultural analysis seeks to challenge conventional views and assumptions about human agency and responsibility in environmental issues, urging us to critically examine the historical and cultural factors that have shaped our relationship with the natural world.

The environmental humanities perspective aligns with Thompson’s understanding of agrarianism as an alternative discourse of orienting humans and the more-than-human world. He argues that embracing agrarian principles meant fostering a deeper connection with nature and reorienting our moral values (2012, p. 55). Agrarian thought centres around humans returning to rural areas, cultivating the land carefully, and living in harmony with the natural world in our surroundings. The term “agrarian” itself, derived from the Latin word “*agrarius*,” signifies a connection to the land, representing a sense of place, home, and living in community, as explained by Freyfogle (2001, p. xiv). Broadly, agrarianism emphasizes the significance of land as a space for cultivation and habitation, with a specific focus on the rural environment and agricultural practices. Danbom (1991, p. 1) posits how agrarianism is celebrated and romanticized in which cultivation of land and rural life positively impacts individuals and societies. The core principles of agrarianism revolve around land cultivation and the interconnectedness between people in rural areas and the surrounding environment, as they rely on the land for their sustenance and livelihoods.

Prior discussion contextualizes two central tenets in agrarianism: agriculture or cultivating land and rural life as an alternative to urban modernity. Agrarianism mainly observes the intertwined nature between people living in rural areas and their surrounding environment, as they depend on the land they cultivate. As Freyfogle explores, “in the agrarian mind, the health of humans is dependent in the long run on the well-being of the larger land community” (2001, p. xix)” Aldo Leopold’s concept of land community and land ethics, as described in his work *A Sand County Almanac* (1950, pp. 4–5), forms a fundamental aspect of agrarianism. It emphasizes a biocentric perspective where humans are no longer viewed as exploiters of nature, detached from the larger natural order. Instead, agrarianism recognizes humans as integral members of a biotic community—a web of interconnected living beings. This shift in perspective acknowledges our interdependence with nature and emphasizes the importance of nurturing harmonious relationships within the broader ecological framework. Agrarianism thus promotes a more holistic and sustainable approach to human interaction with the natural world.

“for agrarians, the land is an organic whole, teeming, when well-tended, with abundant plant and animal

members. Humans are special members of that living community, but they are members nonetheless, not onlookers from afar: They are as linked and embedded as the land’s many other creatures (E. Freyfogle, 2007, p. 16).”

As evident in Anthropocentrism, agrarianism prompts a reevaluation of humanity’s relationship with nature by challenging the assumption of human superiority over the natural world. Marland (2013, p. 860) defines Anthropocentrism as a belief system prioritizing human interests over non-human entities’ interests. This anthropocentric viewpoint becomes problematic when we consider that human senses and perceptions are limited in comprehending the vastness and complexity of the non-human world. Recognizing this limitation compels humanity to reconsider its position as the dominant ruler of the Earth and instead propose an egalitarian relationship among all entities. Agrarianism encourages a shift towards recognizing all beings’ interconnectedness and equal value, transcending the hierarchical view of humans as superior to nature. This humility becomes the founding tenet of the agrarian perspective, as seen in the subsequent quote:

“at the base of agrarian thought about land use is the fundamental recognition that nature is far bigger than humans, bigger than they know or even can know. Human knowledge of nature is limited, encased within layers of mystery. “Mystery helps us orient ourselves to the world by requiring a certain respect and “humility” (2001, p. xxiii).”

Another definition of agrarianism pays more attention to the vital role of agriculture in society. Agriculture and the peasants who worked the soil are regarded as noble, highly regarded occupations, professions, and valuable elements of society (Montmarquet, 1989). In addition to how agriculture is indeed a crucial sector considering that it functions as a food producer, agriculture also performs a philosophical function, as cultivating the land seeks the farmer to consider the nature of humanity’s relationship to the broader environment. Agrarianism designates special attention to farms and farming, stimulating and developing a value relation between society, humans, the environment, and the essence of humanity. This perspective can be seen in the following excerpt, “the practice of agriculture and farming establishes a privileged outlook upon fundamental questions of human conduct, and, sometimes, the nature of reality itself.” (Hilde, 2003, p. 335) Agriculture is also a means of reflection, how humans reassess their relationship with the nature they cultivate. Summarizing these two views on agriculture, Thompson offers his definition of agrarianism based on the romantic and pragmatic notion of agriculture. Agrarianism, as Thompson interprets it, “designates different moral, social, political, and even metaphysical philosophies that accord special roles to farms and the practice of farming.” (2010, p. 1) Agrarianism contemplates agriculture as a regular occupation and a noble job with its associated moral, social, political, and metaphysical functions.

The reassessment of humanity’s relationship with nature is the subject of thought offered by Freyfogle. He observed how agrarianism makes humans rethink the presupposition that

considers humans superior to nature, as seen in Anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism, as proposed by Marland, refers to “a system of beliefs that places the interest of humans over those of non-humans, (2013, p. 860)” Anthropocentrism is problematic in which humanity’s five senses and their sensory abilities are unable to grasp and comprehend the vastness of the more-than-human world fully. The realization of this inability, in turn, compels humanity to rethink their position as the seemingly suzerain of the Earth and instead proposes an equal relationship among entities. This becomes the founding tenets of the agrarian perspective, as Freyfogle proposes:

“at the base of agrarian thought about land use is the fundamental recognition that nature is far bigger than humans, bigger than they know or even can know. Human knowledge of nature is limited, encased within layers of mystery. “Mystery helps us orient ourselves to the world by requiring a certain respect and “humility” (2007, p. xxiii)

Agrarianism highlights the significance of human humility in reassessing our relationship with nature. It calls for a shift from considering ourselves as masters of nature, recognizing that nature possesses its agency and active subjectivity, and challenging the presupposition that humans inherently have the authority to rule over supposed inferiors. Agrarianism acknowledges the impossibility of fully comprehending the exact definition of nature and states that humanity should possess humility in its interaction with the natural world. In other words, agrarianism is a philosophical outlook describing the interwoven nature between human culture, its practices and the environment. It focuses on how material practices shape values, norms, and social institutions (Thompson, 2008, p. 528). A person who advocates for an agrarian lifestyle aims to foster a more humble and respectful relationship with the more-than-human world.

This paper foregrounds agrarianism as an alternative environmental outlook based on sustainability that redefines human and more-than-human world relationships. Agrarian principles, emphasizing rural living, sustainability and agriculture’s value, are positioned as a counter-discourse to modernity, especially its reliance on technology and scientific knowledge which detrimentally impact the environment. This environmental discourse is not a novel aspect of Western philosophy but is heavily influenced by Ancient Greek philosophy and continues to provide valuable insights to address contemporary environmental problems. The main underlying principle glorifies rural life and agriculture, which persists from the Ancient Greek period. In ancient Greek society, agriculture was highly esteemed and considered the noblest occupation. This perspective is evident through Fite’s assertion that agriculture was seen as useful, enjoyable, righteous, healthful, and even blessed by God (1968, p. 294).

Hanson further explores the agrarian view of ancient Greek society in his book “The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization” (1996). Hanson examines how the development of agriculture in Greece gave rise to an idealized archetype of rural and pastoral life, which has continued to be idealized in Western society. As Marland suggests, pastoral theme in contemporary nature writings

provides a framework to explore the themes of economic, environmental, and cultural change and the burgeoning awareness of ecological damage (2021, p. 3). This agrarian conception in ancient Greece is particularly depicted in lyrical agrarianism, characterized by pastoral elegies and praise for a simple life. Hesiod’s poem “Works and Days” exemplifies this agrarian view, glorifying farmers who diligently cultivate the land and depicting fertile fields yielding abundant harvests for the community. Hesiod’s words convey that those who practice true justice and tend to the fields are spared from famine and disaster. The poem also highlights nature’s bounty, with oak trees bearing acorns and bees thriving in the mountains. Hanson further examines Hesiod’s representation of agriculture and farmers, believing that it lays the foundation for the concept of agrarianism in ancient Greek society, which later influenced modern agrarianism. This agrarian culture idealizes small, independent farmers who make their laws, fight their own battles, and form a community of resilient individuals (Hanson, 1996, p. x)

Previous studies have examined the topic of agrarianism and its relevance to contemporary environmental perspectives. One study by Robertson analyzes William Gay’s novels, specifically “The Long Home,” “Provinces of Night,” and “Twilight,” to highlight the tension between economics and the agrarian ideal, particularly in the context of colonialism in Appalachia. The author argues that the character Bender struggles to reconcile his agrarian values with the pressures of modern economics as he tries to preserve his family’s ancestral land (2015, p. 365). In contrast, Horrocks explores the application of transcendentalist philosophy in nineteenth-century New England through a close reading of Hawthorne’s “Blithedale Romance.” The author argues that agrarian engagement involves mental and physical actions at the intersection of nature and culture. The paper’s central premise is that the practical application of agrarianism should prioritize responsible labour within the existing eco-social network. (2016, p. 45)

Compared with prior studies, this paper explores the environmental perspectives and ethical approaches depicted in Richard Powers’ novel “The Overstory” through an ecocritical lens. The study investigates the novel’s portrayal of agrarianism, challenges the notion of Anthropocentrism, and highlights the complex human-environment interactions. The paper critically reflects on the alternative perspectives presented by agrarianism, promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices. By examining the non-human world and emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings, this study aims to contribute to the growing field of ecocriticism and deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between humans and the environment.

Objectives

This article examines the environment from an agrarian perspective through environmental criticism applied to the novel “The Overstory.” It focuses on the agrarian principles of sustainability and humility as they are reflected in the actions and thoughts of the characters. The study evaluates whether the characters align with agrarian thought and criticizes the destructive impact of modernity and technology. By offering an alternative way of perceiving the environment

and emphasizing the interconnectedness between humans and nature, the article aims to enhance understanding and awareness while promoting critical reflection on environmental issues.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology emphasizing data, evidence quality, and content rather than quantitative calculations. The chosen method for this study is analytical descriptive, with a specific focus on the theme of agrarianism and the application of environmental/ecological criticism in the analysis of Richard Powers' novel, "The Overstory." The study articulates how the novel highlights an agrarian perspective, underlines the need for sustainability, and advocates for a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and non-human entities. By employing this approach, the study aims to shed light on the novel's portrayal of agrarianism and its implications for our understanding of the environment.

Agrarianism and Ecocriticism in Literary Analysis

As literary criticism, agrarianism and ecocriticism intersect the relationship between humans and the non-human world. This intersection has existed since the emergence of ecocriticism, which began in the 1960s with the publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring." Ecocriticism aims to critique the environmental crisis in America and involves analyzing literary works that focus on the representation of the natural world. This includes examining depictions of life in the countryside and wilderness, as seen in the Romantic literature of writers like Emerson and Thoreau. The interconnected nature of agrarianism and ecocriticism is evident in Bennett's statement.

"ecocriticism has developed with growing academic interest in nature writing, American pastoralism, and literary ecology. The resulting body of critical work claims rural environment and wild nature as its domain, meaning that most ecocriticism in the United States have focused their attention on America's rural past or the remaining wide open spaces of the Wild West (2001, p. 31)

The intersection between agrarianism and ecocriticism is further explored in Major's article "The Agrarian Vision and Ecocriticism" (2007). She emphasizes that the ecological consciousness brought about by ecocriticism stems from issues related to agriculture. The publication of Rachel Carson's influential book, "Silent Spring" in 1962 was a significant milestone in raising environmental awareness and promoting ecological thinking. Carson's work highlighted technology's harmful effects on agriculture, specifically pesticides. As a result, there was a growing preference for organic farming methods among Americans, including farmers, with increased awareness of industrial practices' health and environmental consequences.

Major argues that agrarianism, as defined by Freyfogle, shares many similarities with ecocriticism. The agrarian views on land and its proper cultivation reflect an ecological perspective. For instance, agrarianism emphasizes the

importance of farming concerning the long-term fertility of the land, recognizing it as an inheritance for future generations. Agrarianism affirms farming with "respect for the land's long-term fertility." (Goodyear-ka, 2009, p. 54). The land is seen as an inheritance that will be passed on to generations after us; therefore, cultivating the land must also pay attention to how much land the future can inherit and the necessity of sustainability. An ecocentric perspective can also be observed through how agrarianism adheres to the notion of "a holistic orientation of the world, based upon the premise that we cannot separate one aspect of our lives from any other" (Moore, Araica, and Ruiz 2008, p. 18). This comprehensive worldview, shared by ecocriticism, recognizes the intimate and practical connection between humans and the Earth, as literature often represents the natural world.

Environmental ethics, particularly the ethics of care in agriculture, is fundamental in agrarianism and ecocriticism. It refers to a systematic account of the moral relations between human beings and their natural environment (Indriyanto, Darmawan, and Chandra, 2023, p. 252). This viewpoint emphasizes the connection between humans and land cultivation, including agricultural practices and plantations. However, it also highlights the need for agricultural land conservation to ensure long-term sustainability. The ethics of care in agriculture recognizes that the land possesses the same intrinsic value as humans and thus deserves similar affection and consideration. The underlying principle behind this thought is the realization that land should not be treated as a commodity in the material sense but has its own inherent moral worth and is interconnected with our well-being. It is advocated by Aldo Leopold through his argumentation that land should be given equal moral standing with humanity. Consequently, treating land arbitrarily or engaging in overexploitation is morally impermissible.

Consequently, treating land arbitrarily or engaging in overexploitation is morally impermissible. Instead, we should adopt a responsible and sustainable approach to land use that respects its intrinsic value and promotes the well-being of humans and the natural environment. He extrapolates on how

"it is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land and a high regard for its value. By value, I mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense (1950, p. 223)."

The Agrarian Ideal: Reimagining Sustainable Practices in "The Overstory"

Environmental issues have increasingly become prominent in literature, and a notable example is Richard Powers' novel "The Overstory" (2018). This work of fiction delves into ecological and scientific discussions about nature, tackling global environmental concerns like deforestation, climate change, and other forms of natural destruction. "The Overstory" received the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 2019 and serves as both a passionate call to action and a beautiful celebration of the natural world. Powers employ narrative

strategies to heighten readers' awareness of the intricate relationship between humans and nature, aligning with Indriyanto's perspective on the interconnected nature of human culture, its representation, and the physical world beyond the text. (2020a, p. 4)

Pastoralism and a yearning for rural life are recurring themes in Richard Powers' fiction. In line with agrarianism, Powers skillfully portrays the idyllic scenery of rural areas. He highlights the farmland provided by authorities for those who have a passion for agriculture, depicting the planting and harvesting of crops such as corn, potatoes, and beans. These depictions romanticize agricultural work and capture the essence of pastoral storytelling (Garrard, 2004). In the novel, he represents a strong sense of communality founded upon a connection to the land in various rural communities. These communities value traditional knowledge and practices, emphasizing the importance of sustainable agriculture and living in harmony with the natural world. The narrative vividly captures the self-sufficient lifestyle of the rural community, showcasing their distance from civilization, with their closest neighbours residing two miles away.

"Citizenship comes with a hunger for the uncut world. The couple assembles their movable goods and makes the overland trip through the great tracts of eastern white pine, into the dark beech forests of Ohio, across the midwestern oak breaks, and out to the settlement near Fort Des Moines in the new state of Iowa, where the authorities give away land platted yesterday to anyone who will farm it. Their nearest neighbours are two miles away. They plough and plant four dozen acres that first year. Corn, potatoes, and beans. The work is brutal, but theirs. Better than building ships for any country's navy (Powers, 2018, p. 10)."

The passage explores the issue of sustainability by depicting the agrarian perspective as a more fulfilling and harmonious way of life compared to industrialization. The couple's choice to settle in a fertile area and embrace farming reflects their hunger for a direct relationship with nature and their commitment to self-sufficiency. It suggests sustainable living entails responsible resource usage and a deep connection to the land. By contrasting agrarianism with industrial labour, the passage implies that sustainability encompasses ecological balance and personal fulfilment. Overall, it underscores the importance of prioritizing sustainable practices to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. The passage encapsulates agrarianism's reverence for the land and the belief that agriculture provides a fulfilling and sustainable existence.

Richard Powers strongly advocates for environmental preservation and criticizes deforestation as violent against the natural world. Deriving from Rachel Carson's influential book "Silent Spring," Powers explores the detrimental effects of modernity and technology, highlighting their destructive impact on nature. He exposes how deforestation is driven by an anthropocentric mindset and capitalistic tendencies that commodify the environment, leading to disastrous consequences in the Anthropocene era. Additionally, Powers

emphasizes the threat to the well-being and livelihood of small-scale farmers who prioritize sustainability as they face encroachment from large-scale farming operations. He underscores the deep interdependence of rural communities on the land they cultivate, treating the environment with care rather than exploiting it as a mere commodity. As Thompson proposes, the connection between people and place/locality is closely linked with the idea of sustainability.

"A philosophy of agriculture—and, by extension, sustainability—is thus appropriately attentive to dimensions of place or locale, on the one hand, and local or regional history, on the other. Hence the qualities and endowments of particular places are themes that recur in the ideals of permanence and resilience expressed in the past (2010, p. 10)."

This further underscores the importance of a responsible and ethical land and resource management approach. The sense of place that agrarianism offers is closely related to the lived knowledge of particular places spent taking care of the land or learning about its rules and rhythms (Filipova, 2021, p. 6). The novel highlights the vulnerability of family farms in western Iowa, which face a significant threat from the corporate farming industry. It emphasizes the disregard for proper soil and environmental cultivation practices by large-scale operations, highlighting the potential consequences for the local ecosystem and the livelihoods of small-scale farmers.

"Extinction sneaks up on the Hoel farm—on all the family farms in western Iowa. The tractors grow too monstrous, the railroad cars full of nitrogen fertilizer too expensive, the competition too large and efficient, the margins too marginal, and the soil too worn by repeated row-cropping to make a profit. Another neighbour is swallowed up each year in the massive, managed, relentlessly productive monocrop factories. Like humans everywhere in the face of catastrophe, Frank Hoel Jr. blinks into his fate. He takes on debt. He sells off acreage and rights. He signs deals with the seed companies he shouldn't. Next year, he's sure—next year, something will come along and save them, as it always has (Powers, 2018, p. 19)."

The text explores a nostalgic longing for a bygone era, predating the industrial revolution, where people lived as farmers in the countryside and cultivated the land to sustain themselves. This nostalgia aligns with the principles of agrarianism, emphasizing humility, gratitude, and a pre-modern paradigm that critiques the dominant anthropocentric worldview. The characters' actions reflect an emotional connection to nature, exemplifying an "ethic of care" that treats the natural world with respect and reverence. Swanson indicates the possibility of an ethic of care to ensure the sustainability of Mother Earth and humanity in general (2015, p. 83). Through Patricia Westerford's interactions with the natural world, particularly the cedar tree, the text highlights the attribution of morality to humans and other living beings, acknowledging the interconnectedness and equal status of all entities within the ecosystem, thereby challenging the notion of human ownership over the Earth.

“She addresses the cedar, using words of the forest’s first humans. “Long Life Maker. I’m here. Down here.” She feels foolish at first. But each word is a little easier than the next. “Thank you for the baskets and the boxes. Thank you for the capes and hats and skirts. Thank you for the cradles. The beds. The diapers. Canoes. Paddles, harpoons, and nets. Poles, logs, posts. The rot-proof shakes and shingles. The kindling that will always light.

In this passage, Patricia Westerford engages in a heartfelt conversation with a cedar tree, expressing her gratitude for the many resources it has provided to humanity. This moment encapsulates the agrarian perspective and ethic of care as Patricia acknowledges the interconnectedness between humans and nature, attributing moral worth to the cedar and expressing reverence for its contributions. This humility for the natural world is founded upon the realization that it is the forest that supplies the material ground for society in its close proximity. The dialogue reflects a deep appreciation for the land and emphasizes the ethical responsibility to treat nature with respect and gratitude, highlighting the agrarian belief in the intrinsic value of the natural world. Her perspective, in line with Bryson’s utterance, indicates the need for “an ecological and biocentric perspective recognizing the interdependent nature of the world; a deep humility concerning our relationships with human and non-human nature (2005, p. 2).”

The central themes of agrarianism, a romanticized portrayal of rural life, and a profound sense of humility and reverence towards the environment are advocated throughout the narration. Furthermore, the text also offers a critical perspective on the consequences of modernity and capitalism. It is mainly represented through a sense of nostalgia for an idyllic past where individuals were intimately connected to the land and cultivated the land for sustenance, not commodities. As Regis suggests, what is necessary for a more sustainable outlook is fostering “a reconnection with the landscape and foster social bonding that will renew a citizenry responsibility and collective purpose amidst the nightmare of global modernity (Regis, 2020, p. 163).” This sentiment aligns with the agrarian perspective, which places great value on direct engagement with nature and emphasizes the importance of sustainable practices. The characters’ interactions with the natural world, exemplified by Patricia Westerford’s heartfelt conversation with a cedar tree, convey a genuine appreciation and gratitude for the abundance and contributions of the environment. Consequently, the novel critiques the detrimental impact of modernity and capitalism on the environment, advocating for more responsible and ethical approaches to the land based on agrarian principles.

CONCLUSION

This paper posits the novelty of agrarianism as a counter-discourse to Anthropocentrism based upon an ecological reading of Richard Powers’ novel, “The Overstory.” This paradigm criticized the human-centred view, which legitimizes the continuous exploitation of nature. Agrarianism challenges the anthropocentric view that prioritizes human interests and justifies the exploitation of nature. In contrast with this paradigm, the agrarian ideal

emphasizes the interconnectedness and equal value of all beings within the natural world, based upon mutual dependence and shared respect. This is exemplified by how the novel underlines nature as an active agent instead of a passive subject. Agrarianism promotes a humble and respectful relationship with nature, acknowledging human knowledge’s limits and the non-human world’s vastness.

The implementation of agrarian values through ecocriticism in literary study posits the necessity of reorienting the human and the more-than-human world relationship based upon mutual respect and reciprocity. Embracing the agrarian principle offers a more ethical and sustainable approach to interacting with the environment. Moreover, this study explores how Powers underlines several narrative strategies, such as the personification of nature, to heighten readers’ awareness of the intricate relationship between humans and nature. It posits the interwoven nature between human culture, the representation of literary works and the physical world outside the text itself. As a concluding remark, agrarianism is positioned as a sustainable discourse among environmental humanities in general and literary studies in particular. Subverting anthropocentric values requires a critical reflection on environmental issues and finding alternative approaches to understanding the environment.

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