



## **COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS IN SAFEGUARDING FORESTRY IN RICHARD POWERS' THE OVERSTORY (2018)**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis is an analysis of a novel written by Richard Powers entitled *The Overstory* (2018). It explores the issue of collective consciousness against the destruction of forest. The concept of eco-criticism by Thomas K. is applied to analyze this novel. This analysis focuses on how the concept of collective consciousness is used to prevent deforestation in several characters. This analysis also depends on the character to determine which chapter of the novel are used as the data. The result of the study shows that the characters employ several collective methods to fight against illegal logging in form of protest, petition, and, restoration of nature. In conclusion, collective consciousness can be also applied to prevent destruction of the forest

**Key Words:** *Collective consciousness, Deforestation, Industrialization, The forest*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Human beings depend on nature because forest has become inseparable from human life. People need forest for resources to continue their lives. However, since the industrial revolution, forest's longevity has been threatened by human's desire and lust for their livelihood. Human activities are directly causing the forest around the world to deteriorate. Due to many human activities such as illegal logging, pollution, and deforestation, many parts of forest around the world are getting smaller.

Along with the destruction imposed on nature or forest, the waves of people who are conscious about the necessity of the ecosystem around the world are also growing. Together, those people make their best effort to safe or preserve forest. Those united efforts are also known as collective consciousness. Collective consciousness, according to by Emile Durkheim (1893) in his book *The Division of Labour in Society*, is the set of shared beliefs, ideas, and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society. In this case, collective consciousness refers to the realization of many people to the issues regarding the danger of deforestation. More and more people gradually realize that there is a big toll for all

of their wrongdoings to the nature, and now that toll is long due and need to be solved.

Since the last few decades, people who are aware about the crucial role the forest has in the planet are growing. Several nations have taken action by building conservation areas and national parks. Activists are also taking action towards this wave of environmental conservation by protesting industrial activities that is deemed to be harmful towards ecosystem and actively raising awareness to the people about many species that slowly become extinct. As the result the mass extinction effect caused of human action are slowing down.

These joint efforts from a lot of people around the world to fight the extinctions of biodiversity are the main point in proving the evidence on how people collectively start to be aware about the destruction of forest. After seeing the destruction done upon the forest, many activists have begun to disagree on how industries treat forest around them. People start to protest about illegal logging. They also condemn the government chopping down trees to make space for buildings. Many activists have also teamed up to make their voice louder. In addition they also are trying to spread the messages to the common people.

Further on, this research is conducted to reveal on several of the methods eco-activists used to protect the forest and ecosystem in general, which is raising awareness and uniting their voices. This study is focused on how extensive both of these methods in helping the protection the forest and the environment. Raising awareness is related because when more people known and recognize the problem, the more this problem become imperative to be solved. Uniting voices is also mentioned since if this problem is being known widely, it needs to have a single straight goal to achieve to make all separate efforts impactful. Collective consciousness in safeguarding forestry is one of concerning topic in literature, especially eco-criticism. Several literary works such as novel, poem, and drama portray the state of current nature. The novel *Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers displays the portrayal of the issues of applying collective consciousness in safeguarding forestry.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The analysis of novel *The Overstory* (2018) written by Richard Powers is based on Thomas K. theory of Eco-criticism. This research is descriptive research. The data is identified based on the issue about destruction of the environment that is being halted using collective consciousness. Based on preliminary reading of the novel, elements which will be looked closely are character and setting.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter analyzes the novel *The Overstory* to explore the topic of collective consciousness in safeguarding forestry. This topic is portrayed in this

novel through character, plot, and setting fictional devices. This analysis is using Thomas K. theory of eco-criticism as the base.

### **1. Revelation of Forest Destruction**

This topic focuses on how the plot reveals the characters' realization that forest, and the environment in general, are endangered. Environments and trees are being eroded by the corporation or government, and the characters are there to see it. One of the characters, Douglas Pavlicek, is also the actor that is forced to bring this destruction to the forest by his supervisor. Knowing that the decimation of the forest happens around them, the characters aware that this event must be stopped.

This topic can be summarized as a statement on how human rarely see nature as an intricate and interlinked system and instead perceive them as mangled elements that must be capitalized. Such statement was pictured in the beginning of this novel in this passage:

“Trees even farther away join in: All the ways you imagine us—bewitched mangroves up on stilts, a nutmeg's inverted spade, gnarled baja elephant trunks, the straight-up missile of a sal—are always amputations. Your kind never sees us whole. You miss the half of it, and more. There's always as much belowground as above.”(7)

The phrase “Your kind never sees us whole. You miss the half of it, and more. There's always as much belowground as above.” doesn't only mention that human are oblivious to the complexities of nature that took shapes around the world, but they also imperceptive to the synergies of such complexities. As the result, they convince themselves that their action wouldn't ruin those extensive systems. Coupled with the plot of the novel, the human action towards the species of redwood can be interpreted as a reckless vandalism that echoes destruction towards many other living being in forest, including themselves.

### **2. Joint effort to Safeguard Forest**

This topic focuses on the decision of joining efforts to protest the destruction of the environment. The characters join an organization called “Life Defense Force” to unite their voice. This organization also mobilizes protests that condemn the destruction of the forest. Awareness is being raised from these protests too.

One notable occurrence of protesting against injustice is the sacrifice and willingness to fight for a greater cause. The eco-activist in this novel, Life Defense Force, noted this in phrase: “We're part of a very long, very broad process, all over the world. If those beautiful Chipko women in India can let themselves get threatened and beaten, if Brazilian Kayapo Indians can put their lives on the line, so can we.”(195). from this phrase it is evident that the resistance against tyranny had occurred on many lives across time. The quote also proves that eco-activism

movement isn't just about preserving the trees and forest. It also connected to many other movement such as feminism.

Another notable example in how grassroots movements in protecting the forest are very crucial is proclaimed by one of the character, Mother N: "They're trying to get the cut out before the law catches up with them. But they haven't counted on all of you!"(194). Picking up from her speech, we can interpret from the setting that in order to rival the power of corporation and government, the people must unite their mind. Therefore they can create loud rejection that might awake the rest of people and increasing their influence. The phrase "But they haven't counted on all of you" also correlated to the definition of collective consciousness as it indicated the importance of uniting their voices under an idea. The corporation might bribe and circumvent law to conduct their act of destruction, but with the will of many people, their action can be stopped. This clause also hinted that underground movement is somewhat required after legal ways of protesting failed to bear a result.

After protest and demonstration failed to make changes, Life Defense Force resolved to implement vandalism and misdemeanor. This is apparent in the following quote:

"Two days later, the film hits the national news. Reaction runs the living spectrum. The banner-slingers are heroes. They're grandstanding criminals who ought to be locked up. They're animals. Animals: yes. Big-brained, altruistic, animal con artists who managed to block a state highway for a while and make it seem like wild things might have their way."(210).

Blocking highway is not aimed to disrupt the exploitation itself, but rather to lure attention to the issue of the forest destruction. The phrase: "They're animals. Animals: yes. Big-brained, altruistic, animal con artists who managed to block a state highway for a while and make it seem like wild things might have their way" implies that human life is still easily disturbed by the action taken by nature, thus suggesting that the forest are far more impactful to the human life than what they know.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The concept of collective consciousness in safeguarding forestry is evident in the novel *The Overstory* written by Richard Powers. The link between the characters, settings, and plot shows how ultimately, the responsibility to preserve and protect the trees and forest are down to everyone.

From the plot and characters, we can conclude that the importance of protecting the forest appear from many ways. One of the characters witnesses the destruction of the forest by massive logging activities. Others had to be displeased by the local government and their inaction. The revelation also comes from the discovery of the complex nature of flora that human never sees. All condensed into a single idea that human action can bring irreversible effect to the ecosystem

Therefore, we can conclude that Power's novel, *The Overstory*, brings out a topic about protecting forest. While his works are focused in how the beauty of nature takes shapes around us, we can also interpret that the safety of those system are up to us to protect. It is apparent in how the characters in the novel had gone through many journeys in discovering such necessities. While individually, their action are irrelevant and insignificant, when they decided to gather and group, their voices can be heard and can bring some changes.

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