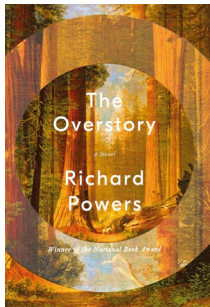


Sempervirens



The Overstory

By Richard Powers

WILLIAM HEINEMANN:
2018. 512pp. £18.99

In *The Overstory*, an engaging tree-centric novel shortlisted for this year's Man Booker prize, Richard Powers tells the story of nine strangers united in a fight against deforestation. This sprawling and gripping narrative of activism highlights the beauty, power and importance of trees, as well as the real-world conflict between humans and the natural world.

The novel begins by introducing nine diverse and seemingly unrelated characters, each with a unique connection to trees. We meet, for example, an artist from a family of farmers that have dedicated years to

documenting the life of a single chestnut tree, a war veteran who survives a plane crash due to an intercepting banyan, a botanist who is both ridiculed and validated for her work on tree communication, and a college student who is electrocuted but brought back to life by spiritual “beings of light and air”. The revival leaves the student with a remarkable bond to nature and marks the beginning of a journey that transforms her into an inspiring environmental activist. The stories of each character begin to unfold, tangling and ensnaring one another and leading to an array of adventures that encompass love affairs, family feuds, violent protests and other-wordly treetop adventures. As the voice of nature brings the characters together to fight the destruction of a virgin forest, there are both tragic ends and new beginnings, with a reminder that sacrifice can bring new life and change.

Throughout *The Overstory*, the descriptive language and strong narrative highlight the longevity, beauty and science of the natural world in an engaging manner that is accessible to all. We are made aware of the interactions that occur below ground,

and the vital services that trees provide by stabilizing our world and uniting living beings. But there is a darker side to the story — the long-lasting destruction that humans impose on the natural world, as we see both trees and human relations fall with the demolition of forests.

With increasing urbanization and deforestation in the world today, books — fiction and non-fiction alike — can be invaluable in facilitating a connection between humans and nature. It can be easy to forget the slow but vast network of trees, but it is essential that we do not lose sight of its value and rights. Using art to compliment science, *The Overstory* serves as a vital reminder of the fragility of human life and as a rallying call to halt the destruction of our world's natural assets. □

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Published online: 5 December 2018

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41477-018-0324-5>