



# **The Trouble-less and Traumatized: Slow Resurgence and Slow Pedagogy in *Bewilderment's* Quotidian Storying**

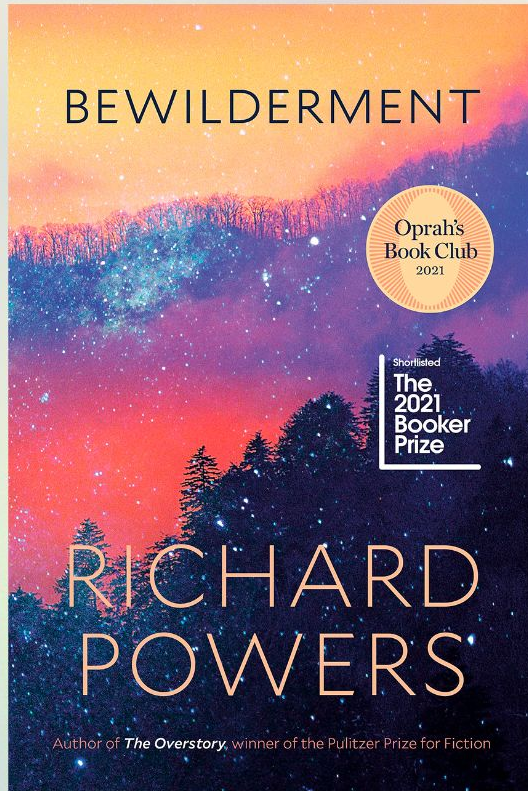
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## Textual Overview

The novel, *Bewilderment*, by Richard Powers is a social and political fictional story told from the perspective of a widowed astrobiologist, Theo Byrne. His narration unfolds his process of learning how to teach/parent his neurodivergent son, Robin, amidst catastrophic environmental degradation and navigating his own loss and trauma.

"The past was turning as porous and ambiguous as the future. We were making it up, the story of life in this place"

"'Trouble is what creates intelligence?' I said yes. Crisis and change and upheaval"

~**Richard Powers, *Bewilderment***

"Nobody does anything by themselves"

"Life assembles itself on accumulating mistakes"

# Overview

This project, works to consider the **space of storying** as a **slow learning, teaching, and healing process** in *Bewilderment*, written by Richard Powers. I will explore in what capacity *Bewilderment* can be understood as a **quotidian story**, about quotidian storying. I will identify to what extend the **mundane** aspects and relationships in Powers's novel **adopt everydayness** as a **function of/in storying**. I focus on what I am understanding as **slow pedagogy** and calling "**slow resurgence**" as emergent processes and assess **storying as a method to theorize a pedagogy** that reflects **incremental capacities** for **reciprocity** and **care**.



# Overview

My research explores Theo's **experimentation of storying** as an **emergent process** of slow resurgence and slow pedagogy. Theo, as a first person narrator, demonstrates **the act of storying** as it unfolds for a reader. Theo, is who I describe as a **mundane but non-neutral character**; he is a **deeply traumatized** subject, though his trauma is not the focus of the story rather, it is simply an aspect about him. I aim to demonstrate that it is **not in the spectacular moments** that Theo is able to make large strides or revelations in his learning and teaching, rather it is in what I am calling **slow "trouble-less" moments** in which he is able to **ground himself**, and **respond with intention and care**. I intend to reveal in what capacity learning, teaching and the act of storying through Theo, **breaks the cyclic nature of trauma** through its **emergent, reciprocal, and healing incremental process**.



# Research Questions

- ↗ In what ways does *Bewilderment* demonstrate how troubled/traumatized individuals teach and learn to teach in *seemingly* trouble-less or mundane moments?
- ↗ If traumatized individuals learn to teach in *seemingly* trouble-less moments, then to what extent can learning to employ slow pedagogy through storying as an act of resurgence enact "becoming-with" and work to break the cyclic nature of trauma?

# Literature Review: Slowness

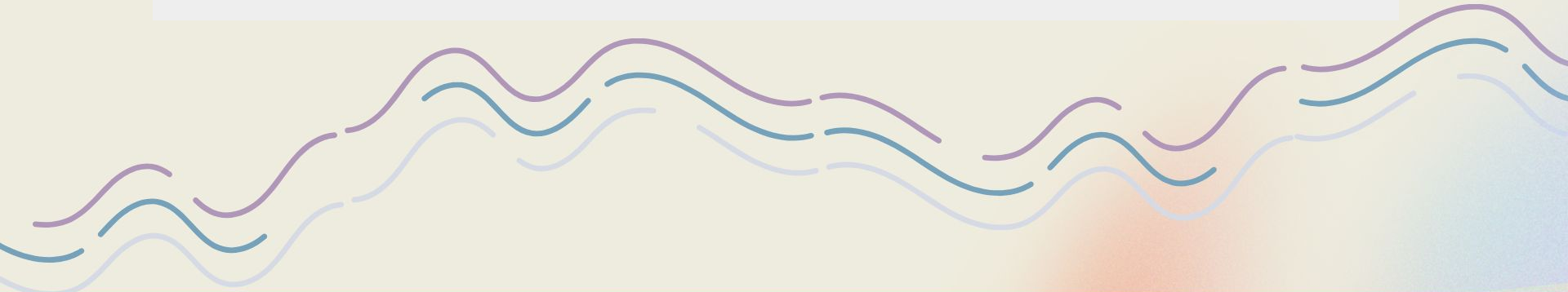
This project understands **slowness** through its interconnections with **resurgence** and **pedagogy** by engaging with the concept that has been developed in environmentalist discourses but applying it to representations of **healing and movement**, rather than harm. In introducing “**slow violence**”, Rob Nixon has challenged the consumability of spectacular violence. Though slowness located in *Bewilderment* is somewhat different, understanding Nixon’s concept of slowness has motivated this study to **identify slowness in different forms** while still being “**neither spectacular nor instantaneous but instead [...] incremental**” (Nixon 257).

Slowness in this project is an inversion of Nixon’s concept and is combined with adrienne maree brown’s understanding of emergence that suggests it “**emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind**” (brown 7). I am understanding the critical connections in storying, theorizing, and teaching as emergent processes because they are **not elite and fixed abstractions**, rather they are **in action, ongoing, everchanging** and **ground up**—all of which, I argue, are **key aspects** in understanding the **value of slowness in process**.



# Literature Review: Storying and Education

Indigenous scholars, Joann Archibald and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, have both developed/engaged with **stories as a method** of teaching, learning and healing and what Archibald coins as “**Indigenous Storywork**”. Archibald has outlined seven theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical storywork principles: “**respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy**” (Archibald 1), all of which will be employed in understanding the method and process of storying in *Bewilderment*. Simpson emphasizes the value of **slow pedagogy, storying**, and the necessity of **reciprocal and “consensual”** (Simpson 161) relationships between learners and teachers in learning and story. Their concepts of story and storywork have aided in conceptualizing how I employ **storying as an ongoing and collaborative act**.

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# Literature Review: Storying and Trauma

**Storying** *requires* at least **two parties** which encourages one's “**response-ability**” (Oliver 87) and **fosters a dialogue** between sharer and receiver, or testifier and witness. Trauma studies explains that when people are harmed by trauma, as is the **interconnectivity and co-reliance on safety, belonging and dignity** leading to an internal battle for the recovery of these **inherent needs** (Haines 134). **Storying** is explored as a potential **method of healing** and recovering these needs as its **roots in reciprocity and responsibility** allows it to be understood as a **dynamic, living, emergent, empowering** and an **interactive healing process**. **Storying needs an ‘other’ to witness, relate, and reshare** story through their own contexts to rebuild interconnectivity and co-reliance on safety, belonging and dignity.



I aim to offer an understanding of **what comes after trauma** and how to “**become-with**” (Haraway 1) trauma as an **ongoing venture**. Haraway suggests that we need to “**make trouble**, to stir up potent response to devastating events **as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places**” (Haraway 1). This project engages with what I am calling “**trouble-less**” moments which are defined as **seemingly without trouble** and moments that are **still in quiet trouble** but masked due to their lack of spectacle and their mundaneness/quotidian appearances. This concept emerges as a combination of Haraway’s work in *Staying with the Trouble*, Michelle Murphy’s “**alterlife**” that “names **life already altered, which is also life open to alteration**” (Murphy 497), and adrienne maree brown’s discussion of **emergence** and “**fractal**” processes that argues “In the framework of emergence, **the whole is a mirror of the parts**” (brown 11-12). In unifying these concepts, I argue that **trouble-less moments cannot be seen in isolation, but instead as inherently connected to other traumas and troubles.**

## Literature Review: Trouble-less



# Methodology

This is an **interdisciplinary project** that enters in conversation with **feminist scholars, trauma studies, indigenous studies/education, and anti-capitalist and anti-colonial discourses** among others.

In working with my primary object, I will offer a **close reading** of *Bewilderment* by **focusing on the quotidian or mundane aspects and relationships** that are illustrated in Powers' novel. Specifically, I will analyze Theo Byrne and his relationship to his son, without offering a distinct analysis of his son. The focus of this paper requires me to **look beyond the instances of the spectacular and isolate mundane moments and demonstrations of everydayness/the ordinary.**

The focus of analysis will include:

- Theo's stream of consciousness as storying
- Theo's action of storying when teaching his son, Robin
- Theo's everyday movements and actions as trauma guided responses

In focusing on the quotidian of the story, I will analyze his **demonstration mundanity but refusal of neutrality** and how his **slow but continuous movement** and processing seems **central to his learning, teaching and healing.**

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