

Enacting and exploring ideas in fiction

Donald Nordberg

Abstract for paper presented at the Great Writing conference, London, 15 July 2023

Abstract: Philosophically engaged fiction often employs ideas in ways that reflect the exploitation-exploration dilemma in developmental psychology: by exploiting well articulated theories by enacting their conflicts, or by exploring the uncertainties of puzzling ontologies or moral complexities. We can see this in action in many works, but some novels of ideas seek to defy such categorization. This paper analyses two recent works – *The Overstory* by Richard Powers (2018) and Elizabeth McKenzie’s *The Portable Veblen* (2016) – showing how they deal with related concerns and settings through very different approaches. While Powers offers an enactment, its complexity seeks to evade the book becoming a simple polemic. McKenzie’s protagonist explores her muddled identity, philosophy and much else while flirting with the enactment of ideas when she does not comprehend.

Donald Nordberg is Associate Professor at Bournemouth University Business School and a doctoral candidate in creative writing at the University of Exeter. He is author of *The Cadbury Code and Recurrent Crisis* (Palgrave, 2020) and *Corporate Governance: Principles & Issues* (Sage, 2011), and has published management research in journals including *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, *Leadership*, and *Philosophy of Management*. His writing on literature appears in *New Writing* and *Philosophy and Literature*. A native of Chicago, he was a journalist living in New York, Frankfurt, Zurich, and London. He now writes fiction in rural north Dorset in England.