

**FFBC**

First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the *First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.*

February 2020

Volume 25

Issue 2

The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, February 7,
2019
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:
Hoyt Sherman Place,
15th & Woodland,
Des Moines



R.S.V.P.

JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com

or phone (515) 288-2500

or the website
by Tuesday,
February 4.



FFBC Website:
www.ffbciaowa.org



Macro-Economics 101

by Jonathan Wilson

Trickle down is a fraud. George H. W. Bush was right to characterize it as voodoo economics. Employers do not “create” jobs. Tax breaks for corporations won’t change that. Tax breaks for the wealthy won’t change that. We are being lied to, again -- and again, and again.

Demand creates jobs -- pure and simple. That’s the way capitalism works. It’s true of EVERY business model in a capitalistic, market-driven economy. This is irrefutable. It’s true like the sun rising in the east and setting in the west.

New entrepreneurial capital can “create” jobs, I’ll give you that. But, short of an early bankruptcy, the new jobs created will be measured at best, and calculated to test and confirm the sustainability of demand for the new venture’s goods or services. That ripple in an economy is not a tide that will lift boats. It functions at the margins unless and until demand kicks it into high gear. When demand does kick in, boats rise.

The truth is that employers will not hire anyone new until demand demands it. With a sole-owner private company, self-interest will drive this phenomenon. Imagine yourself as a private company owner; until there’s demand that appears sustainable and beyond the capacity of your existing workforce that no amount of squeezing it can satisfy, then you -- reluctantly -- add staff. Even then you might hire only temp employees to gain greater assurance that the demand is sustainable.

In a publicly traded company, the law itself drives the phenomenon — the employer has a fiduciary duty to avoid adding jobs (despite tax breaks or other incentives) unless the demand for the employer’s products or services demands it. Only if the employer can’t meet the demand by squeezing existing staff to the max, will another job be created. Until then, tax breaks and incentives go to the bottom line, to stockholders, or both.

The fraud works because most people who are employed perceive that the employers who are hiring, “created” the jobs they are hiring to fill — without understanding that the ONLY reason the job is there is because of demand for products or services and the employer’s inability to meet the demand by squeezing more productivity from existing staff. In macro-economic terms, altruism has never created a job. The good of the overall economy has never created a job. The greater good has never created a job. The desire to see more jobs created has never created a job.

**TRICKLE-DOWN
ECONOMICS**



[continued on page two]

I'm hiring more now often for yard work and house cleaning out of no longing to create a job. I'm doing it because of my desire not to do so much of that stuff anymore. My self-generated demand drove me to hire those things done by others, and decidedly not by my altruism, not by my desire to see the economy flourish, and not by my wish to see a hardworking person working hard in return for compensation.

Capitalism is not ever philanthropic when it comes to jobs or wages. When capitalism is working as designed and as required by the law, employers will try to get more productivity from existing employees, minimizing or avoiding wage increases, and postponing new hires until there's confidence that the demand is not abating.

Absent demand, a tax incentive goes to the employer's profits, stockholders, or exploring other profitable enterprising in a measured way.

It's fraud to claim that companies "create" jobs. Those who claim otherwise are ignorant or lying — more likely the latter. And those who buy into the fraud are walking, talking examples of the failure of our public education system.

If we're being lied to about this— what else are those same folks lying to us about? We need to be supporting policymakers, and those seeking to become policymakers, who - - at least -- aren't lying to us about the mechanics of job creation.



“There are none so blind as those who refuse to see; none so deaf as those who refuse to hear; and none more self-righteous than the recently reformed.”



February's Speaker:

Courtney Reyes



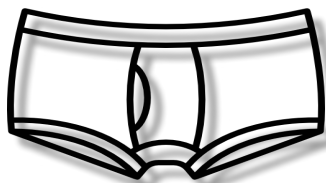
Our speaker in February will be One Iowa Executive Director Courtney Reyes. You won't want to miss this. You are also encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend!! Provide the name(s) of any anticipated guest(s) so we can have name tags for them at the registration desk.



“If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.”

Bill Anderson

Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks to **Ryan Crane** for introducing our January speaker, Iowa State Senator **Claire Celsi**, Executive Director of the Des Moines Area Religious Council. Thanks also to **Jordan Duesenberg** for his work on the FFBC website. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter production editor. Thanks to **Ryan Weidner** for his work as our technology guru. *Thanks to all our contributors to the monthly newsletter!*

A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the Donor Direct program of United Way. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.

Our annual fundraising effort is underway to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over \$250,000 for scholarships that are awarded to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a contribution on line or by sending a check. Also, you're invited to a donor recognition party on February 7, 2020, from 6:30 - 10:00 p.m. at the home of Jonathan Wilson and Scott Kuknyo, 2924 Druid Hill Drive, Des Moines. No charge. Food and beverages will be provided.

The next copy deadline for the FFBC newsletter will be **February 17, 2020**. If you have something on your mind, put it on paper and get it to me by the copy deadline. It'll be interesting, good therapy, or both. Caring is sharing.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. **Book donations are always welcome.** Thanks to **Scott Kuknyo** for helping coordinate the book exchange.

Don't Miss the

DEADLINE!

Reflections from Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus

by Tim Schreck

Happy New Year! I've been thinking about 2019 through the lens of the Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus, and all the wonderful things we've experienced in the midst of these convoluted times.

Our three primary concert events in 2019 involved the technical and emotional challenges of performing **Unbreakable** in March, the mix of rap, disco and country music at **Cabaret**, and the beauty of our December concert selections. Due to demand, we expanded to three nights for **Cabaret** and, with greatly enhanced marketing efforts, we sang to record crowds all year long!

For me the three most memorable moments of 2019 were...



3.) Performing **Unbreakable** - as one of the first choruses in the country to perform this entire master work depicting the past 100+ years of the LGBTQ movement, with an amazing orchestra and soloists that only Dr. Rebecca Gruber could have gathered. What a privilege, and what a night!

2.) The first night of **Cabaret** in June, when America's potential first, first-husband Chasten Buttigieg took the time to visit us backstage, and then we walked out to perform for Dennis and Judy Shepard, parents of Matthew Shepard. Over time, the significance of that juxtaposition of past, present, and future in LGBTQ history has become more apparent, and I am amazed that we were there.

1.) Participating in the memorial service for Chief Justice Mark Cady as the only invited choral group. It was really a simple request (excluding Dr. Gruber's efforts involved in securing music, lining up an orchestra, etc) and yet, through the course of the service and testimonials that day, I heard the message that the fight continues, and that DMGMC was invited as an important participant on the front lines for LGBTQ community rights and acceptance. Again, what an honor.

These were my favorite moments, you may have a different list. There are so many other things I'm grateful for - our expanded and re-energized board of directors; several fabulous new singing members (I'd name names, but then I'd forget someone!); the various community events where we were invited to sing.

[continued on page seven]

The Celsi Agenda

by Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, January 3, 2020, was Iowa State Senator Claire Celsi, first elected last November to the vacant seat (District 21) previously held by FFBC member Matt McCoy. (District 21 covers parts of the south and west sides of Des Moines, many Polk-County precincts of West Des Moines, and the city of Cumming in Warren County.) Claire regaled us with a stirring account of her road to the Iowa Senate, and outlined the issues she expects to work on hardest in her first term.

Claire will serve on the Appropriations, Education, Natural Resources, State Government, and Government Oversight committees, and as Ranking Member of the Administration and Regulation Appropriations Subcommittee. She told us that her three primary goals in the coming legislative session are to:

- **Increase public education funding, and reverse the collective bargaining debacle that Republicans engineered two sessions ago;**
- **Restore Medicaid to state control in order to help the most vulnerable in our state and to keep providers in business; and**
- **Fix our broken mental health system and adequately fund it.**

Her keen sense of humor – and of outrage – made Claire Celsi's appearance at this meeting a highlight of the season.

You can listen to a complete audio recording of Celsi's lively remarks, and the following Q&A, by clicking on the Speakers tab at our Web site, <ffbc-iowa.org>.



Ryan Crane introduces the January speaker
Photo by Gary Moore



Photo by Gary Moore

Claire Celsi grew up on the south side of Des Moines, graduating from Dowling High School and from Drake University, where she majored in journalism. She began her adult life, as the majority of girls her age, with marriage and motherhood, but her native outspokenness (the nuns in her grade school were not pleased) quickly led her into community activism. She was deeply involved in the movement to ban smoking in public places, has advocated for affordable housing projects in West Des Moines, and remains very active in making sure that public schools are not privatized in Iowa.

She spent her career in the non-profit, political, and advertising agency world before starting her own business in 2009, where she works with small to medium-sized companies, nonprofits, and government agencies to help them get noticed through public relations, marketing, and grassroots advocacy. Her clients have included the Des Moines Water Works, the Iowa Lottery, Iowa Economic Development Authority, the Iowa Tourism Bureau, Kinze Manufacturing, and Weitz Construction Company. She has served on many boards of directors over the past 20 years, including Iowa Great Places, and Central Iowa Shelter and Services. As an adjunct faculty member at Drake, she taught courses in internet marketing, public relations writing, and social media.

After losing a 2016 Iowa House race to the incumbent, Claire decided to run for the Senate District 21 seat left open by Matt McCoy's run for Polk County Supervisor two years later. She told us that she learned from the mistakes of her first campaign, and so she believes in supporting other sympathetic candidates and activists who want to make a difference: she spends time coaching candidates and helping them develop messaging, and also works actively on the ground, knocking on doors as a volunteer.

Family is very important to Claire: she is the mother of two adult daughters (whose father came out as gay after eight years of marriage, but has remained in their lives since the divorce) and stepmom to a daughter and son. She's also a very proud Grandma to two-year-old Mia, now a motivating factor in her new legislative agenda. Claire wants to make sure that Mia will have a strong public-school system to attend, and clean water to drink, and that she won't have to be paying off student loans into middle age. Claire's husband Jim Walczyk is an IT professional, a graduate of the University of Iowa, and a USATF track official who coaches track and field at Lincoln High School. As of January 13, Sen. Claire Celsi can be reached professionally at the Iowa State House via claire.celsi@legis.iowa.gov and (515) 462-0487.

Starting Off 2020 with a Bang

By Jordan Duesenberg

I just had my first experience of losing out on something because of my beliefs and/or sexual orientation. I know, many of you have experienced this all throughout your life, so I'm fortunate in that respect, but it doesn't sting any less. I was fired from a DJ gig three days before the event because my DJ name was deemed too controversial. The bar that hired me, that also markets themselves as an alternative, "underground" location, actually made me choose a DJ name that fit with their aesthetic. So, after trying to think of something for about a week, I finally came up with the name Mondo Nexus. "Mondo" means bizarre or something striking, while a "nexus" is, essentially, a connection. I figured a striking connection is exactly what I'm trying to do with the music that I play. I also happened to get help with the name from a gay adult film from the 70s, also called *Mondo Nexus*. I was very upfront with the bar that hired me about the origins of the name, which they loved and, also that I exclusively play gay underground disco, or what I call "leather bar disco."

I didn't get into DJing for money, which can be a nice side hustle, or to look cool or whatever. I do it because I love music so passionately and I also want to showcase music from the LGBTQ+ community, which is why I mostly play disco (if DJing on vinyl). I also play a lot of House as well (another genre with gay origins). I'm fascinated by disco music because it was the music of our people. How I understand it, disco allowed our community to come together and escape a society that wasn't always the kindest to us and to dance and act how we wanted with one another (before it was commodified and sold to larger society as leisure suits and John Travolta). I'm also very fascinated with our community and our relationship with pornographic content. First off, adult films from the 70s and early 80s are like time traveling to that era but, also to my understanding, adult films were often-times some of the only positive examples where gay men got to see themselves represented onscreen. Before then, the depiction of gay men on film was anything but positive – we were either campy femme queens (I don't see anything wrong with this), murderers, or we died tragically. So, what I'm trying to say is the name I chose for myself I'm extremely proud of.

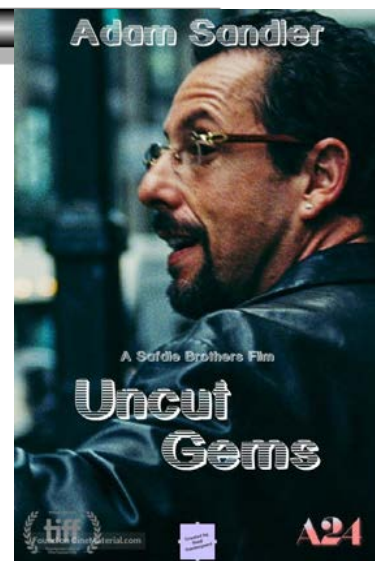
Again, the bar that hired me was very ok with this when they hired me. They marketed me and I told everyone about the event, especially since it was a monthly gig, and if I continued to bring a lot of people in, I'd get two nights a month. Unfortunately and unexpectedly, three days out, I was sent a message that they had to cancel my gig. They had a recent profile in the paper and Christian Conservatives were upset that they use certain religious symbols as decoration in their bar and, as a way to further avoid controversy, the bar was cancelling my gig because my name had a connection to an adult film (and they claimed they received complaints). I'm also guessing because I'm very upfront about being gay, which you could clearly see on my Instagram page they had linked me to. Lastly, I'm guessing because the marketing had rainbow colors insinuating its LGBTQ+ connection. The last slap in the face was when they told me to change my name if I wanted a chance to be hired in the future. I was obviously infuriated, because: one, I don't back down to bigots; two, you can't market yourself as an alternative bar and give into Christian Conservative concerns; three, it's not like my name was DJ Bonerjamz; and four, this made me look extremely dumb because this was three days out from my event that I had been talking up to everyone and anyone. I told the bar that I won't compromise my artistic integrity and I refuse to change my name even if it means I never get hired there again. I also made clear that I hope they realize how much harassment we get in the LGBTQ+ community without every backing down to bigots or people who complain about our "offensive" nature. I'd say the bar's name, but you can probably put two and two together. I don't want a boycott of their bar, because I believe success is the best revenge, but it was definitely not the best way to start my 2020, and it made me realize that just because people say they're tolerant and progressive, when tested, actions speak much, much louder than words.





Uncut Gems

A Film Review by Mark Turnage



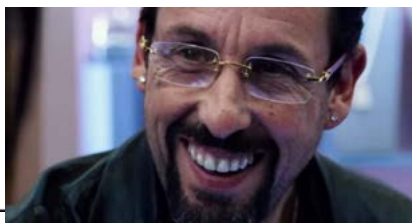
Sometimes, a movie captures my interest because I get to see a familiar actor cast against the type the actor normally plays. Adam Sandler's filmography has been characterized by loud, boisterous comedies, but also rare departures into independent cinema that are a far cry from his other films' slapstick tone (see also: *Punch Drunk Love*). *Uncut Gems* is one of these headier films—a nonstop, anxiety-inducing character study of a Jewish New York City hustler burdened by gambling debts and crumbling relationships due to his own poor decision-making. *Uncut Gems* moves like the plummet of a roller coaster but, despite a strong performance by Sandler, its pace compromises plot details and character-building for the sheer sake of driving the narrative forward.

The film opens at an Ethiopian mine, where a gruesomely injured worker is being evacuated from a mining pit after finding a chunk of rock containing black opals, the titular “uncut gems” of the story. Cut to New York City, where jewelry store owner Howard Ratner (Sandler) is concocting schemes to pay off his massive gambling debts to his loan shark brother-in-law. Despite being perpetually followed by thugs looking to collect, Howard continues to live his life on fast forward, using his own customers' jewelry as collateral to finance high-stakes bets on basketball games. This practice comes to a head when Boston Celtics star Kevin Garnett (as himself) visits Howard's shop and the store owner shows him an opal stone. Transfixed, Garnett offers his championship ring as collateral to Howard in order to borrow the stone before his game the next day, believing it to be a good luck charm. You can guess what Howard does to try and save himself, impress Garnett, and make a fortune.

Once the basketball star goes AWOL with the stone before its auction, the movie is like a Coen Brothers plot on speed: a fiasco (typically criminal in nature) erupts around a terribly flawed character who makes progressively worse decisions that compound said fiasco, accompanied by bits of comedy in the form of intentionally cringe-worthy humor. It's those uncomfortably awkward moments where Sandler excels. In one great scene, he's kidnapped from his own daughter's school play by the loan shark's thugs, desperately pleading for them not to lock him up naked in the trunk of his own car (they do). Later, he flies into impotent rage at his mistress for flirting with a celebrity in the middle of his own concert (which erupts into an embarrassing fight outside the club). Combined with the grimy cinematography of street-level urban NYC, it's soapy, like getting a front row seat to Jerry Springer. But you're torn on whether to empathize with the guy or anyone around him, because he's so damn selfish that the only real “family” he has are those who share his greed. You halfway want him to win, and you halfway get some satisfaction from watching these thugs beat him up.

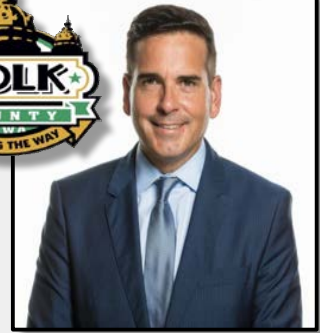
And here's where *Uncut Gems* loses some luster: everyone feels the same way about Howard, including the audience, so the characters that have known him the longest don't want any part of him. What could be interesting opportunities for exposition (and manage the pace of the narrative) become sneering reminders of what Howard is, but not a clear picture of what he was. There's one world-building scene that stands out, though: a bat mitzvah with Howard's family, at which his brother-in-law is also present. Throughout the film, Judaism also plays a prominent role, often as a meditative contrast to the visceral threat of what will happen to Howard next. But it feels atonal when so much of the film is a bullet train(wreck).

Uncut Gems is the flipside of the American Dream: you can win big if you're constantly hustling and stay one step ahead of the other guy—but at what cost to your own humanity? For Howard, he's most alive when he's at risk. See it on DVD if you need a shot of adrenaline.



Assault on Democracy

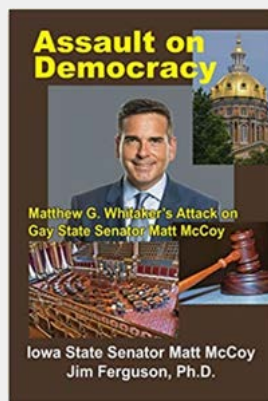
By Polk County Supervisor Matt McCoy



This month I finally published a book that took more than a dozen years to complete. I, along with my co-author Jim Ferguson, released ***Assault on Democracy***.

My decision to write the book was complicated. Reliving the agony of what I went through a dozen years ago was not an easy exercise. When President Trump named Matthew Whitaker to the post of Acting Attorney General, I knew that I must tell my story and do all that I could do to ensure the appointment did not become a permanent appointment.

What is contained between the covers of this book is a highly personal story, a story painfully shared as I came to terms with my past, my true identity, and the challenges foisted upon me. As an elected official at the time, this was played out in full view of the public. I struggled with alcoholism, my sexual orientation, and divorce, and I fought a trumped-up federal charge of attempted extortion.



This book is about a federal witch hunt led by then U.S. Attorney Matthew G. Whitaker as he sought to use any means available to break my spirit, deplete my resources, and derail my political career.

For 18 months of my life, the FBI, under then U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and his henchman, U.S. Attorney Whitaker, stopped at nothing to rob me of my reputation, livelihood, and most concerning, my freedom. The dissonance created in knowing what legally should be happening, but experiencing the opposite, was frustrating, resulting in unending anguish.

According to a 2007 study by Shields and Cragan, it was found that U.S. Attorneys investigated seven times as many Democratic-elected officials as opposed to Republican-elected officials in order to disrupt the Democratic Party at the grassroots. It provided the evidence of why the D.O.J. was interested in me and other Democratic-elected officials.

At the time that these partisan prosecutions were occurring, eight U.S. Attorneys were fired from their positions in December of 2006. All of the U.S. Attorneys were in good standing, and most of them were appointed in swing states. The U.S. Attorneys believed that their firing was a direct result of their failure to prosecute certain elected officials and ignore wrong-doing of others, all at the direction of Attorney General, Alberto Gonzales.

Our book is available at Amazon Books online and Beaverdale Books locally. The book will set you back about 15 bucks. It is an easy read, and I hope you will take the time to read it.

Our Democracy is fragile. It is being threatened by a variety of factors today. The Trump presidency is a lethal poison that will dismantle our country if left unchecked. I hope that you will be part of the resistance that prohibits this from occurring.

[“DMGMC Reflections” / continued from page three]

I also love that in November we held a cold-weather clothing drive and chorus members responded with over 200 items for our fellow Des Moines homeless citizens! And we donated 200 extra cookies to Central Iowa Shelter and Services on 12/23/19, after our December concerts.

We have also experienced loss this year, particularly our lovely former member Hal Thompson in April, as well as chorus member parents and loved ones. For those who experienced personal loss or challenges, I hope they felt the DMGMC family lifting them up in those difficult moments. We had some members decide it was time to take a break and we wish them well; we will gladly have them back if they choose! And through this all, Ben Hagen and Dr. Rebecca Gruber -- our foundations, our cornerstones, our rocks -- have kept the ship steady. Their patience, guidance, wisdom, humor, and drive keep us going and lift us up. I believe DMGMC has become a well-regarded, respected member of the Des Moines arts community, and it's the continuing leadership of Ben and Rebecca that has gotten us to this point.

At the time of this writing, the first rehearsal of 2020 has passed and we are off and running. DMGMC has exciting plans for the coming year, both in our music and in our outreach initiatives. We'll be singing for you in March at Sheslow Auditorium and again in June at the annual cabaret event. Join us...I think you'll like what you hear!



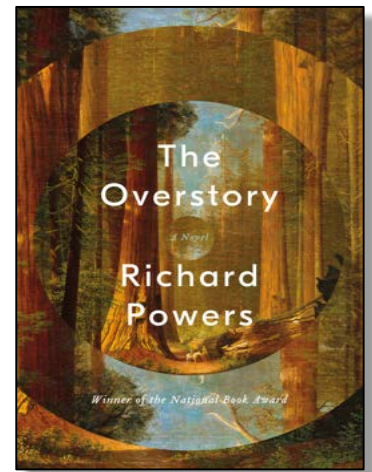
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The Overstory

By Richard Powers

A Book Review by Steve Person



Back in the mid 1970s, I enrolled in a graduate program at Drake University. One of the courses I took was American Novels of Social Criticism. It included, among others, titles by James Fennimore Cooper (*Home as Found*), Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*), Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*), Joseph Heller (*Catch 22*), and John Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*). The latter was and is one of the most powerful books I ever read. After all these years, I have come across a book just as powerful—*The Overstory* by Richard Powers. It won the Pulitzer Prize for 2018.

Richard Powers structured his novel around trees and their impact on the lives of humans. He divided the book into quartos: "Roots," "Trunk," "Crown," and "Seeds." The characters in the story include Nicholas Hoel — and his ancestors—(who end up in western Iowa), Mimi Ma, Adam Appich, Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly; Douglas Pavlicek, Neelay Mehto, Patricia Westerford, and Olivia Vandergriff. Powers intertwines some of these characters through chance encounters and some who are never aware of the others. One of the main themes of the book is the greed human beings inflict on Nature, especially trees, in various parts of the world but particularly in North America.

Powers's grasp of the English language is compelling. When I was teaching Advanced Placement English Language and Composition, one of the precepts I tried to impress on students was the power of the two-word sentence. Powers excelled in this with such examples as, "Control kills," and "Connection heals." Both of these refer to the clear-cutting of old growth redwoods and other conifers in the American Northwest. Some of the characters even spend months in the branches of giant redwoods in an attempt to prevent the destruction of a living being that is over two thousand years old.

Likewise, the author's use of similes and metaphors make for thought-enhancing imagery. "He buys a steam tractor that both plows and threshes, reaps and binds. It bellows as it works, like something set free from hell." Or, "Then he's in a grove of poplars, shaggy as a gang of teens."

It is obvious that Powers is a man of great intellect and education. One of the facts he imparts is that humans and trees share twenty-five percent of their genes. Likewise, he is obviously a student of philosophy, especially the Taoism of Lao-tzu: "A thing can travel everywhere, just by standing still."



What struck me most about this book and Steinbeck's great opus was the dark quality embodied within and yet offering hope at the end. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, after a harrowing trip from the Oklahoma Dust Bowl to the false hope of California, the young Rose of Sharon, who recently lost her newborn baby, offers her milk-filled breast to a starving man thus saving him from imminent death. In *The Overstory*, after all of the characters have met with less-than-happy endings, the author lets it be known that once Mankind has stripped the earth of its riches, the world as it should be will return: "This a voice whispers, from very nearby. This. What we have been given. What we must earn. This will never end."

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