

Agency: A Postmodern tool in Richard Power's 'The Over Story'

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Abstract

This paper attempts to project Richard Powers as one of the major novelists of America, works on the scientific observations through the medium of literature about the basic concern of the danger of deforestation to the planet and to humanity. The prevalent companies and organizations are given more acceptance than the environmentalist which has become a threat to the natural environment to provide clean and fresh air. In the novel 'The Overstory' the trees play a role of an agent to bring the catastrophic incidents in the limelight through the nine different protagonists. The novel brings forth the concept of prioritization of maintaining the forest over the industrialization of the society in the post-modern era. In the novel trees as a non-human agency portrays the natural beauties and the act of sacrifice by different characters through the act of bravery, sacrifice and compassion.

Key words: Agency, Postmodern, Trees, Time, Deforestation

Richard Powers novels is one of the finest examples in the field of English literature which focuses on the various current issues of modern science and technology. He is one of the finest American novelist who explores the effects of modernity through the medium of literature. Richard Power won the Pulitzer Prize for his fiction 'The Overstory'. He won National Book Award for Fiction for his novel 'The Echo Maker' in year 2006. Powers has published twelve novels and has taught at the University of Illinois and Stanford Universities.

Richard Powers writes big narratives of ideas about characters unafraid to tangle with the implications of having ideas and to articulate that remarkable enterprise with wit and erudition. His characters are remarkably expressive, thoughtful, their conversation rich with allusion and puns. Powers has described his characters as

“obsessed with the erotic’s of knowledge.” His novels evidence an audacity in narrative structuring a fondness for scale, a love of the elaborating terraced sentence, an encyclopedic command of arcane knowledge, a broad use of referents drawn from high and low culture, a fear or fascination with the metaphors of contemporary science, and keen interest in language and specifically the imperative of tale telling- each a defining element of such post- modern fiction.

Richard Powers gets acknowledged for his varied narrative structures and get accolades for his stylistic writing and the portrayal of characters. His varied character represents the different strata of society who worked as an agency to save the redwood trees and further becomes the victim of the modern society. Furthermore, the novel has been divided systematically in four parts- Roots, Trunk, Crown and Seeds.

Agency in Fiction.

Powers states that “Agency is the power to make choices” or “the ability to act or the true way to success.” Agency is an actor’s ability to make purposeful choices. The characters of the novel have no choice to make as an agency. It states about the ability or capacity of the characters or protagonists to make choices not whether those characters actually use their capacity. The actions or the situations are the result of what the characters chose or wanted.

There is agency in all kinds of fiction which can be studied from different angles. The characters in the novels, stories make good or bad choices and then suffer the are stories about people who made good or bad choices in the past and then pay the cost of those sufferings and consequences. In every fiction, the main characters always have choices to make and usually the choice leads to the further thread of the story. When the characters don’ pick their agencies as required or do pick wrong choices which leads to the turning point in any novel and reader gets perplexed to understand the choices made by the concerned character.

It is the freedom and capacity of a character to work as an agency in this postmodern era. In the novel ‘The Overstory’ the different nine protagonist make their own choices to save the chest nuts, redwood trees and control their acts and life accordingly. The characters take desired actions and control the schema of the novel.

Powers reveals that humans don't have the best grasp on time. All the protagonist live in the present, incapable of realizing that there are, for example, some pines that have been *dying* before humans invented writing. The humans cannot conceive of the impact of their choices have on the future, and we cannot comprehend to set aside what the short-term has for us in order to prepare for the upcoming future.

Berman ,Marshall states, “The modern challenge to notions of agency stems from the postmodern assault on the self as a centered presence. In postmodern life, the notion of agency, centered on a self with the capacity to act commendably upon the world, seemingly dissolves and is replaced by floating signifiers, transforming agency into a passive cacophony of language games in which “all that is solid melts into air.” The post-modernist preoccupation with the decease of the self appears excessively abstract as well as insensible to the many and varied circumstances that provide substantive resources for the production of agency.” Trees perplex us in their ancientness and different experience of time. In the novel, Patricia states that a dead tree has more life on it than a living one; this obviously baffles the mind, as the tree has stepped out of time in one respect, but is still very much a part of it in another. The old-growth forests snub and scare people, so they clean the trees up and cut the trees down, again literally erasing history as well as part of the future. Powers wishes us to experience time as the projection of rebirth and renewal. The characters play a vital role as an agency along with the non-agency represented by redwood trees in silicon valley.

Mehan and Wood states, “Agency need not be perceived as the centered source of action but as a reflexive product of it.” As Alan Wolfe (1997) notes, "We are, in Taylor's phrase, 'self-interpreting animals,' in the sense that what we are indistinguishable from how we understand ourselves. In the matter under consideration, practitioners of everyday life produce themselves that they, as practitioners, use to assign agency to their conduct. In talk and interaction, agency serves to accountably describe and explain what is said and done by those concerned people.”

Brady (2018) states, “The trees are the longest-lived form of life on the planet earth, who lives in the sky, on the surface and under the ground.” We will learn to reign ourselves to the influence of the earth or we will disappear.” In the post-modern era, number of novels have come with the subject pertaining to the environment, nature and in relation to trees.

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