



Cite Us



Allegorical Interpretation of Powers' The Overstory: A Postmodern Study



Saba Rashid *

Asim Karim †

Corresponding Author: Saba Rashid (M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: sabarashid543@gmail.com)

Abstract: *This study debates The Overstory from a postmodern allegorical point of view to draw multiple meanings. In essence, postmodern allegory draws attention to a text's true meaning. By analyzing the various symbols and emblems in Richard Powers' The Overstory, this study seeks to examine postmodern allegory and determine what it all means. Because in addition to being a classic allegory, it demonstrates the variety of meanings that may be ascribed to various visual and textual elements. It continues to be inviting. The idea has been divided into other categories, such as the relationship between trees and people, trees and other living things, and trees and spirituality. In the "Tree and Human" segment, the relationship between the two is looked at from a variety of angles to convey a variety of meanings through the characters. The importance of nature's life is demonstrated in the second section of "Tree and the Other Living Things." The fourth and final part connects the connections between people and trees as a spiritual incarnation.*

Key Words: Postmodernism, Postmodern Allegory, Overstory, Postmodern Fiction

Introduction

Postmodernism is a philosophical and cultural movement that emerged in the late 20th century as a critical response to the principles and assumptions of modernity. Apart from its multilayered connotations like the rejection of grand narratives, a scepticism towards fixed meanings and truths, and an emphasis on fragmentation, difference, and the deconstruction of established categories, it has generated a crisis of thoughts and epistemology. The crisis is inherent in its challenge of many assumptions and foundations of modernity, challenging traditional notions of objective truth and universal knowledge (Habermas, 1990; Lyotard, 1984.)

The breakdown of conventional theological and moral systems results in spiritual instability in this framework. Several individuals have difficulty with existential problems and looking for new sources of meaning and purpose as a result of the fall of religious organizations, the critique of meta-narrative by postmodernism, and other factors. The results of the search frequently include a wide range of spiritual and philosophical pursuits, spanning New Age mysticism and Eastern spirituality to individualized worldviews and diverse spiritualities. The profusion of various systems of thought and the lack of definitive rules both add to the impression of religious disorder. People move through a huge marketplace of ideas,

* MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Professor, Department of English, University of Wah, Wah Cantt, Punjab, Pakistan.

Citation: Rashid, S., & Karim, A. (2023). Allegorical Interpretation of Powers' The Overstory: A Postmodern Study. *Global Social Sciences Review*, VIII(II), 399-410.

[https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2023\(VIII-II\).27](https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2023(VIII-II).27)

DOI: 10.31703/gssr.2023(VIII-II).27

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2023\(VIII-II\).27](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2023(VIII-II).27)

frequently feeling uncertain and confused as they create unique moral narratives.

In despite of the disorientation, postmodernism offers opportunities for individual freedom and spiritual innovation. It promotes the examination of other viewpoints, the dismantling of conventional hierarchies, and the acceptance of multiple truths. As people create their own religious paths and adopt a diversified worldview, this can promote a feeling of emancipation and independence. The task is to go through this tumultuous environment with discernment, openness, and an openness to accept the shifting nature of meanings and the diversity of spiritual alternatives. This study explores how allegory evolves in the postmodern era, drawing on poststructuralist and postmodernist theories. The complex connection between allegorical and postmodernism is revealed by an examination of important traits and instances. In the end, this investigation emphasizes the complex ways in which postmodern allegory can be used to analyze actuality and question conventional patterns of perception.

The focus of this study paper is on analyzing and evaluating the book *The Overstory* from Craig Owens' theoretical position of postmodern allegory. Postmodern allegory signifies a form of storytelling or artistic expression that utilizes allegorical elements within a postmodernist framework. To understand the postmodern allegory, it's important to first grasp the concepts of postmodernism and allegory separately. Actually, Postmodernism is a philosophical and cultural movement that emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to and critique of modernism. It questions conventional ideas of reality, legitimacy, great narratives, and established truths. Postmodernism emphasizes the subjective nature of human experiences, the irrationality of knowledge, and the notion that speech and social circumstances shape reality. (Kavya & Thomas 2018). On the other hand, allegory is a literary device in which social, political, or ethical ideas are conveyed by figurative people, things, or locations. (Kerr-Koch 2013). This superficial narrative in an allegory typically serves as a metaphor for an ulterior or even more ethereal idea. Whitman (2000). Combining these two ideas results in contemporary allegory, a literary form that uses allegorical themes to illustrate the dispersed,

ambiguous, and multifaceted aspect of postmodern reality. Postmodern allegory frequently questions conventional narrative frameworks, defies accepted interpretations, and fuzzes the lines between fact and fiction. Muniz and Sumaira (2002).

The symbolism and metaphors utilized in postmodern allegories can be interpreted in a variety of ways, representing the diversity of ideas and the dearth of absolute truths. They might contest the validity of great stories and the idea that there is a single, unchanging value. Postmodern allegories frequently address issues like linguistic complexity, materialism, consumerism, dynamics of power, and identities. Overall, postmodern allegory can be seen as a reflection of the postmodern condition, emphasizing the fragmented, subjective, and elusive nature of meaning in contemporary society. (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990).

Based on Craig Owens' writings in *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*, this section will concentrate on three allegorical features in postmodern art (Owens, 1980). Three characteristics of postmodern art will be discussed: image appropriation, site-specific work, and hybridization. The next section of this study paper will go into Craig Owens' allegory idea. Owens contends that allegory is the impulsive driving force of postmodern art creation and perception, using Benjamin's notion of allegory to examine postmodern artistry.

October had a profound impact on the critical study of allegory in the late 1970s and early 1980s. October is a politically and intellectually radical journal⁴⁹ that published several pieces on allegory theory between 1976 and 1981, one of which being Craig Owens' *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*, which has become a touchstone of allegory discourse. According to Craig Owen in *The Allegorical Impulse*, adopting allegory to art criticism is a journey into predetermined terrain, since it has been entirely rejected in the realms of aesthetics and philosophy during the previous two centuries in comparison to Symbol.

On the other hand, largely inspired by Benjamin, Owens develops the idea of allegory through reading the post Structuralists of Lacan, Derrida and Paul de Man and suggests allegory is the alternative to understanding postmodern art

will play a significant role in art criticism for the reason that

“The allegorical work is synthetic; it crosses aesthetic boundaries. This mixing of styles, which Duchamp saw coming, is still going on today in the form of hybridization, or works that are a mix of many different kinds of art. Appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursively, and hybridization are all ways that contemporary art is different from the modernist art that came before it. They also make sense when you look at them in terms of allegory. This suggests that postmodernist art may be driven by a single, consistent idea and that criticism won't be able to explain that idea as long as it thinks of allegory as an aesthetic error.” (Owens, [1980](#), p. 51)

The work *Appropriation of Image* represents the first connection between allegory and postmodernism. It is the creation of a picture by replicating existing images from cinema stills, photography, and drawings. Whether via alteration or direct seizing of pictures, appropriation art seeks to diminish and obscure the original meaning, purpose, and even authority. Appropriation is defined as taking anything as private property and making one's own action or amount of taking property for one's own use.

“Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images, but confiscates them. He puts a claim to something culturally important and pretends to be its interpreter. And in his hands, the imagery takes on a new meaning. He doesn't revive a lost or distorted actual meaning... Rather, he adds, he does it simply to supplement: the metaphorical meaning takes the place of an earlier one.” (Owens, [1980](#), p. 69)

As a result, allegorical works of postmodern art make use of pre-existing pictures in other works of art or images found in mass media and commercial marketing. These images are then cropped and reconstructed in another cultural and social context to serve as their own unique piece of art. These appropriated pictures might be described as a supplement of existing fragmented leftovers, which have disguised meaning via the use of imperfection and incompleteness in their presentation. Because of this, allegory is criticized for lacking a clear meaning and being imperfect and incomplete in its presentation of ideas.

Allegorical Interpretations

The overall theme of trees and their meaning are intertwined with the lives of numerous characters in Richard Powers' novel "The Overstory" in this complex and multi-layered narrative. According to an allegorical perspective, the novel's trees might be seen as metaphors for various facets of human existence and the interdependence of all living things. In essence, the story's plurality is a postmodern characteristic that sets it apart from earlier and more established allegorical works.

First of all, trees represent perseverance and strength in metaphors. The characters in the story demonstrate great persistence in the face of challenging situations, both human and environmental, in a manner similar to how trees endure the test of time, withstanding storms and adjusting to their environment. The trees stand in for an individual's soul's tenacity and potential for development. Trees are additionally viewed as a symbol of connectedness and community. In the book, Powers highlights the intricate web of collaboration and interaction that exist amongst trees in a forest. This demonstrates the mutual dependence of individuals and the conviction of each action has an impact on the community as a whole.

Ultimately, the disparate accounts of people come together, emphasizing the idea that our lives are connected in usually subtle but significant ways. The trees also represent the worth of nature itself and the necessity of environmental control. As they discover the intricate world of trees, the characters develop a great appreciation for the environment and an awareness of the responsibility to preserve it. The devastation of trees in the novel is a metaphor for the larger issue of the degradation of the environment and the results of disregarding our relationship with the environment. As a result, the trees serve as a call for action that inspires people to reflect on how they interact with the environment and the importance of conservation. Trees are commonly utilized as metaphors for growth and transformation as well. The novel's characters undergo tremendous changes as they grow closer to Mother Nature and acquire new insights into the world. The growth of trees from tiny seeds into powerful beings reflects the protagonists' own struggles with awareness of themselves. The trees, which represent the potential for change

and human progress, push the readers to think about their individual pathways of evolution.

Tree and Human

In this part, we will examine the metaphorical connotations of trees with regard to humans, specifically focusing on how trees are allegorically tied to people. In the first place, the postmodern metaphorical meaning of a tree is related to human existence in the sense that in this context, trees are not just trees but rather the next level of humanity. This symbolic view of trees is examined in the first chapter of the book, which takes place when an unidentified lady is seen leaning against a pine tree, taking pleasure in the beautiful breeze, and getting messages from the trees. Then, a pine tree spoke to her, telling her that:

"All the means you imagine us enchanted mangroves up on stilts, a nutmeg's inverted shovel, gnarled baja elephant trunks, and the straight-up missile of sal are always amputation. To the woman, he sings a chorus of living wood. Listen, says the pine she's leaning against. There's something you need to hear. " (Powers, 2018, p. 7)

The tree seems to be addressing the lady, but allegorically, it symbolizes that the human of this postmodern period is addressing other humans. As the tree is lonely and wants to speak to someone, so is the person of this age lonely and seeking attention. Because people in this century have grown more materialistic and preoccupied with their own lives, they are unconcerned with how others feel, whether they are happy or unhappy. Because contemporary man is exclusively concerned with his own motivation, his materialistic mentality is bringing him to his own end. He doesn't care about people, but he does care about machines. As a result of its avarice, humanity's graph is plummeting. As a result, everyone is looking for attention, but no one is free to listen. The pine tree is connecting with the lady and attempts to get her attention. As a person attempts to attract attention in order to communicate his problems or seek assistance from others, no one glances back or pauses for a moment.

Another postmodern metaphorical interpretation of this talking tree is that people and trees do not get along. In reality, people in the postmodern age have a bad relationship with one

another. This impoverished relationship develops as a result of the pine tree's bargaining with the lady. It allegorically portrays how human relationships or ties in the current day are just self-centred and focused on greed. These short-term relationships expire with the passage of time. Likewise, humans' relationship with trees is founded only on avarice, commercialization, and destruction. Humans only care about trees for economic reasons. People need trees, but trees do not require humans. Trees have their own lives, families, and a strong connection with people. The relationship between trees and people occurs in the primary event of the tale, which starts with the novel's opening chapter *Roots*. The narrator masterfully describes a scenario at the beginning of the chapter that emphasizes the significance of trees: "Older trees are our parents, and our parents' parents, you must be gentler if you wish to comprehend the mysteries of nature" (Powers, 2018, P. 11). Here, the narrator emphasizes the importance of the trees, saying that ancient trees are similar to our parents, but allegorically, it signifies that people before World War I were profoundly attached to nature and even closed to one another. They spread love and respect, and their feelings for one another were genuine. However, after World War II, individuals were disillusioned and their illusions were destroyed. Humanity does not important to contemporary man, and he just communicates with people for his personal benefit.

Chestnut Tree and the Life of Nicholas Hoel

The third postmodern allegorical viewpoint is related to the relationship between trees and people, which is also an indication of human destructive tendencies against nature and mankind itself. The Hoel family's chestnut tree represents humanity's disastrous dominance over nature. Hoels' family sustaining the chestnut tree for years exemplifies humanity's destructive force and hollowness. Actually, the chestnut tree is a family heirloom that has been passed down from generation to generation. When Jorgen Hoel arrives in Brooklyn, he carries six chestnut seeds with him. He sows these six seeds, but only one survives. This chestnut tree is designated as a sentinel tree. Meanwhile, the fungus that kills chestnut trees arrives, spreading the blight over state boundaries. However, this chestnut tree is

one of the ancient trees that has survived the disease. "Trees succumb by the hundreds of thousands" (Powers, 2018, p. 17). This is how humanity or the relation of human beings with one another and with non-human objects like nature is coming to an end with the passage of time. This last chestnut tree allegorically represents that humans are not dead; they are alive but they are completely hollow now in this postmodern materialistic era. The human emotions have dried up. The humans of this era have become soulless bodies.

In addition to this, the Hoel family has its own metaphorical importance from the postmodern perspective, which is that this family maintains conserving ancient customs and humanity since they have owned the chestnut trees for a very long time. They continue to practice the same traditional customs and beliefs. But in the postmodern age, these long-held beliefs were disproved: "Four billion trees in the native range vanish into myth" (Powers, 2018, p. 19). Along with the disappearance of these trees in the billions, mankind itself disappeared. This age-old custom is carried on by the Hoel family, although it isn't as strong as it used to be in more recent times. This is because one of the Hoel family members, Frank Jr., is living a meaningless existence as a result of the pointless family's age-old ritual of snapping photos of trees. "It's a monthly exercise in noticing a thing worth no notice at all, a creature as steadfast and reticent as life" (Powers, 2018, p. 20). It shows the disappointment of the postmodern age due to its hollowness.

Mulberry Tree and the Life of Mimi Ma

The fourth layer of the postmodern allegorical meaning of the tree is again tied to human existence. It reflects the diminishing value of trees in our contemporary period as well, which allegorically signifies the decrease of meaningful history and heritage. "You and the tree in your backyard come from the same ancestor. Even after such a long voyage in opposite directions, you and that tree share a fourth of your genes" (Powers, 2018, p. 139).

The relationship between people and trees also comes up in Mimi Ma's story, which starts with the history of his family. The story starts with Ma Sih Hsuin, Mimi Ma's father, and Ma Shouying, her grandfather. They spend a lot of

time together and talk about their family histories. Due to the 1949 communist revolution in China, Sih Hsuin's father is willing to send him to America to study. Basically, this communist revolution started during the Second Sino-Japanese War, which lasted from 1937 to 1945. During this war, China was split into three parts: Nationalist China, which was controlled by the government, Communist China, and parts that were occupied by the Japanese. Under the flag of the United Front, China's armed troops were supposed to work together, but each group was fighting against the other two. By the time Japan accepted the terms of the Potsdam Declaration on August 14, 1945, China had been mistreated by Japan for many years and had been in a terrible war for eight years. Millions of people had died from starvation or disease, and thousands had died in battle. But the fighting in China did not stop with the end of World War II. The worst things that happened in China caused a lot of damage. People in China had to leave their country to save their race, treasures, and ways of life (Dreyer, 2014; Pepper, 1999; Weatherley, 2007). As Shouying told his son that communists would destroy their family and their wealth:

"Son Listen. You can store a family fortune in so many ways. This was my way. I thought that we would gather these items and secure them. We'd find them a place when the world returned to normalcy---a museum somewhere, where every visitor would associate our name with (...) He gives a nod to the Luohans who are playing on the eve of Nirvana. Do what you like with them." (Powers, 2018, p. 34)

Following that, Shouying tells Ma Hsuin about the family treasure. The three jade rings, each of which has an intricately carved image of a distinct tree and an antique Chinese scroll with painted designs. Give this priceless relic to Shouying so that he may bring it with him to the United States. As a result, when seen from an allegorical viewpoint, it depicts the true fact of the chaos, devastation, dread of death, and elimination that exists in the postmodern period. War is causing people, their history, and their values to become scattered. Some people are even being forced to flee their hometowns in order to save their own lives, and those towns are on the verge of being destroyed. Wars provide nothing but destruction, which in turn has a negative impact on the human psyche and shatters their

ideas about life. People make valiant efforts to preserve their ideals, but ultimately, they are obliterated from existence forever. As Ma Hsuin promises to his father to bring these things back when all will safe here but his father responds, "You can't go back to something that has already happened" (Powers, 2018, p.34). As his father knows the aftermaths of war that nothing will be left. Besides, when something moves from its original site, it will lose its value and strength.

Similarly, individuals lost their places and positions as a result of World War II, and postmodernism simply delivered the most bizarre style of existence. It is evident in Ma Hsuin's life in America, where he changed his name to Winston Ma, implying that he lost his identity. He must deal with identity difficulties. As a result, he must alter his name, language, culture, customs, and whole way of life. In addition, in memory of his father, he planted a mulberry tree in his garden. The presence of the mulberry tree will bring riches to his family, but it may also bring disaster. Winston Ma dedicated his whole life to saving the tree from germs but was dissatisfied and committed himself to the mulberry tree. It suggests that he was unable to endure the shame of losing a family treasure in the shape of a tree. It suggests he sought to keep his ancestry with him, but circumstances prevented him from doing so, leading him to commit suicide. Carrying both the guilt and the desire to preserve tradition in this day and age is difficult.

Tree and the Life of Other Living Being

The metaphorical meaning of trees in relation to other beings is further emphasized in Richard Powers' novel "The Overstory," which highlights the mutual dependence and relationship of all living things, including humans. The trees act as visual metaphors to emphasize the underlying connections and similarities between nature and humanity. First of all, trees represent origins and history in an allegorical sense in relation to humanity. People have their own grounds in their households, communities, and pasts, just as trees possess profound roots that anchor them to the earth. When people in the story interact with trees, they experience a feeling of identification and connection because they realize the value of knowing their own origins and respecting their ancestors' legacy.

In addition, trees symbolize shelter and sanctuary in the context of animals and other species, according to metaphorical significance. For many different organisms, trees serve as ecosystems, residences, and means of safety. The novel's characters also find refuge and solace in the company of trees. The relationship between trees and animals highlights the delicate equilibrium of ecosystems and the crucial part that each creature plays in preserving the beauty of nature. This allegoric connection emphasizes the interconnectedness of life and calls readers' attention to the importance of maintaining and safeguarding every aspect of life.

In addition, trees possess metaphorical significance in the natural world since they represent the complex web of life. The book illustrates how closely connected and cooperative trees are in a natural environment, highlighting their group wisdom and fortitude. This allegory refers to mankind as a whole, emphasizing the value of teamwork and coordinated effort in resolving environmental problems. It challenges readers to think about their stewardship of the planet and their responsibility to preserve and reestablish the fragile balance of the environment. Last but not least, trees are emblematic of the cycles of development, destruction, and rebirth that occur throughout the lifespan of an individual. Trees record the flow of time by witnessing generation after generation. This allegory implies that people, like trees, are part of a broader circle of life and that each person's unique story is connected to others' lives. It emphasizes the significance of nurturing and maintaining the natural world for generations to come while encouraging readers to consider their own demise and the impact that they leaving behind.

The first layer of postmodern metaphorical meaning of trees and life in the world of trees shows that trees are not just trees, but also homes for birds, animals, and insects. Trees are not only connected with human life but also with the lives of other living beings on the Ground since the earth is known to contain life. In addition to plants and trees, insects play an important role in Earth's ecosystem. Through Adam's affinity to ants, the story explores the symbolic significance of insects in postmodern aspects of life. Adam is a haemophilic (tree lover), but he also gets close to non-human items like ants and all of nature's

life. He pays close attention to ant behaviour. According to Adam, healthy bits of intelligence will one day control the globe.

"When Adam falls for ants. One September Saturday, he watches them flow across the neighbours' sidewalk, dragging a spilt Popsicle back to their base, watching flow (...) Nonetheless, they transport the sticky food return to the nest in a great organized manner" (Powers, 2018, p. 61).

Ant's life is associated with the world of trees that has multiple allegorical meanings in the postmodern approach such as ants representing that society does not encourage individualism. This postmodern dilemma analyses Adam's tireless efforts when he keenly starts to observe the ant's life and their activity on daily bases. He makes a document on ant life for the school project but he failed to convince the authority that it's his own project. 'Studying the behaviour and intelligence of ant colonies. "That's when Adam realizes: humankind is deeply sick. The species won't last long. It was an aberrant experiment" (Powers, 2018, p.63). It got rejected by judges because all students' dads have done the entire project for their kids. Adam has done it by himself as well as his work is quite unique and complex as compared to others. Therefore, the judges couldn't believe him. "Did you get the idea from somebody? Did you copy an experiment?" (Powers, 2018, p. 63). No one recognizes how hard someone has worked or how well they can do something right now. This is the main reason why young people are sad. Young people give up on themselves because of these actions, just like Adam's passion and interests were crushed by judges. So, if someone is smart and has a lot of passion, no one will let them down. So, trees give people life, power, intelligence, etc., but people cut them down for short-term needs. This is a metaphor for how people today can't handle someone else success. No one wants the other to move on. In fact, this is how people kill each other.

Ants represent the oneness of all things, including religion, in postmodern metaphorical meaning. But how tragic that humans nowadays lack the capacity to sympathize, have trust, and be confident. Allegorically, ants teach humans how to deal with adversity, and how to maintain unity and faith in the face of adversity, since ants never yield and are very formidable in terms of power,

resources, defence, and unity. "Their massed deployment matches any human genius" (Powers, 2018, p. 61). However, human deployment is no longer like that of ants due to human greed, which has resulted in unpredictability and a lack of unity, honesty, purity, and so on. Apart from that, ants' unity and steadfastness provide the impression that the only people who can dominate the world are those who have discipline and togetherness. There is no rule where there is no unity and no trust. As a result, today's people are dispersed since there is no unity or faith.

In the postmodern way of thinking, ants also stand for the idea that people should live simpler lives. But now, people care more about money than they used to. People always try to get in each other's way and show off how they live. But in the rush to live a modern life, people have forgotten what a simple life is worth and even what life is all about. In the race for money, people have forgotten what life is all about. This obsession with money makes people do bad things like jealous, get angry, hate, kill, and so on. People are now short-sighted, greedy, want to be in charge, and only care about themselves. Things like making money or getting political power become more important than living a peaceful life. Money can change the way people think, but it can't buy happiness. Before postmodernism, people lived simple, peaceful lives because they didn't chase after money. Instead, they worked hard for what they had and were happy with what they had. They used to live together, help each other, and had no feelings of hate. People today don't care about peace of mind because there is nothing more important to them than making money. The money influence on modern man appears in the novel when Nick and Mimi Ma survey the land: "Every tree he looks on belongs to a Texas financier who has never seen a redwood but means to get them all to pay off the debt he took on to acquire them" (Powers, 2018, p.265). Money makes a man do many things that are not good and ethical because to harm nature for making money is entirely immoral.

Besides, ants also have another postmodern allegorical meaning of life which is nurturing social values. Ants and humans are the same in many ways. Most prominently, both live in a large society. Secondly, both are appointed for work, and they both spend most of their lives doing work. "Plans in the absence of any planner"

(Powers, 2018, p. 61). They operate in a methodical manner in the same way that humans do. They use a decentralized system to coordinate the job that they do. For instance, when humans work together in a group, they divide up their tasks so that one group is responsible for organizing the raw materials and another group is in charge of putting them to use. Ants, in contrast to most other kinds of insects, live in large colonies that can have anywhere from hundreds to thousands of members. Even they work together in groups to find solutions to challenges, just as humans do. Ants have a lot of ingenuity when it comes to their task. They are successful in preventing their deaths. They store food away for later use or in preparation for difficult times. They construct these sanctuaries in which to hide and relax. Not only that, but ants also demonstrate an important aspect of life, which is how to create a plan, maintain discipline, and be patient while enduring hardship. The third characteristic of life is called communication, and it is seen most often in the lives of humans and ants. Without communication, there is no way to have a community, and none of the species on earth could survive without it either. Despite the fact that different living creatures on Earth use different methods of communication. Both humans and ants are extremely capable of communicating with one another verbally. Ants communicate with one another in a variety of ways, including by sound, by brushing their antennae together, and most crucially, by emitting odorous chemical compounds known as pheromones. Humans, on the other hand, interact with one another in a number of different ways.

Spiritual Dimensions

Tree as a Guiding Creature

Trees can be viewed as allegoric symbols of spiritual guidance since they serve as basic links between nature and spirituality. Allegorical depictions of trees throughout the book as spiritual guides underscore nature's capacity for metamorphosis and the potential for awakening oneself. First of all, trees function as a storehouse for wisdom and transcendence as spiritual tutors. Through their interactions with trees, the narrative's participants experience revelations and religious awakenings. The protagonists see the trees as ancient beings with vast knowledge of nature who might have the solutions to existential

concerns. In accordance with this allegory, trees serve as conduits to a pearl of higher wisdom, guiding individuals through their journeys of spirituality and disclosing the most profound truths of life.

As they immerse themselves in the world of trees, the heroes begin to comprehend their own place in the larger web of creation. This allegory highlights the idea that trees, with their numerous branches and intricate root systems, act as a metaphorical bridge connecting the physical world and the realm of the spirit. They encourage individuals to expand their limited perspectives and adopt a thorough understanding of the interconnected fabric of life. Trees, which serve as spiritual protectors, also stand for the possibility of growth and change. Characters in the text undergo major changes whenever they come into contact with vegetation, which causes them to reevaluate their goals and ideals as well as become spiritually cognizant.

In accordance with the story, trees have the power to help individuals develop and widen their consciousness, so motivating them to develop a closer relationship with other people, themselves, and the world around them. Additionally, the sense of sacredness and the divine's existence in nature is highlighted by the metaphorical meaning of trees as spiritual teachers. The book depicts trees as sacred spaces where people can find solace, contemplation, and an awareness of spiritual fellowship. In general, the metaphorical readings of trees as religious mentors in "The Overstory" highlight their roles as messengers of wisdom, interconnectedness, growth in oneself, and sanctity. Richard Powers utilizes the analogy to explore how the environment can affect people's lives and how the natural world offers the possibility of spiritual awakening. By acknowledging the metaphysical direction offered by trees, people are inspired to investigate deeper elements of their individual spiritual quests and forge greater relationships with ecology.

There are various ways that have been explored to know the spiritual connection of trees to humans. The meaning of allegory begins with the divine truth of trees with human test exits before the world began. This concept varies from religion to religion but in Bible, God created all types of trees for food that also pleasing to the eye. (Arentzen, Burrus, & Peers, 2021; Hooke, 2011; Sahoo, 2014; Shah, 2015). But in the

middle, there was a tree of knowledge or a tree of life. It was forbidden for Adam and Eve to touch the fruit of that tree. This tree became a great upheaval for both because they disobey God and then both were expelled from heaven as punishment. (Reat, 1975; Sheikh & Dixit, 2015; Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022). This allegorical representation of the Tree of Knowledge gives a clear lesson to humans which is true forever that God is the Creator and has consigned rules and directions that help humans to live healthy and prosperous life as well as have spiritual development in this world. But the sad reality of postmodern humans is that human ignores these rules which brought negative consequences.

On the other hand, trees were godlike for humans in ancient times. Trees have angelic significance in different mythologies in the world. But with the passage of time, the worth of trees began to decrease for humans. Especially, after the deterioration on a huge scale due to wars. Where everything has lost its meaning, trees have also lost their worth. This truth of modern life about the chastity of trees has examined in Patricia's story in the novel:

"Let me now sing to you about how people turn into other things. She returns where acorns are a step away from faces and angels' bodies are made of pine cones at those words. She begins to read the book. The stories are odd and fluid, and they date back to the dawn of time. They seem to be familiar to her as if she was born to be close to them. The fables seem to be less about people turning into other living things and more about other living creatures metabolising the wildness inside individuals that never really went away, at the moment of greatest peril." (Powers, 2018, p.125)

Here in the novel, Patricia's father teaches her the worth of trees that how trees are significant in this world. He tells her trees to have big families. Trees are as old as humanity; they both got older from time to time. Just as humanity has disappeared in the present age, the importance of the tree has vanished. Because belief in religion or god has faded away in the postmodern age due to the massive destruction of wars. These wars caused humans' beliefs to shatter and made humans think that there is no god. If there is any god the wars must be stopped and save the world. Due to this uncertainty, everything that is connected to god has lost its worth among

modern people. But people before were religious and remained attached to holy things or holy practices. Unfortunately, these holy practices have no more worthy for humans. For instance, trees were worthy before but now it has lost their dignity because modern human is cutting a tree for short-term benefits. "We know so little that how trees grow, almost nothing about how they bloom and branch and shed and heal themselves. We've learned a little about a few of them, in isolation. But nothing is less isolated or more social than a tree" (Powers, 2018, p.123)

The second postmodern allegorical meaning of a tree as a spiritual incarnation is again related to human guidance about life. The circle of tree life itself gives a message to humanity such as tree roots only grow in fertile soil same is the case with humans' life where awareness occurs only in pure hearts. Besides, as trees are treated to eyes, calm, grounded and wise they also invite humans to collaboration with something special that is greater than humans. These remarkable beings connect humans directly to peace. This living intelligence links humans to their own senses, bodies and hearts that other external sources cannot do. In this chaotic and challenging world, there are some things that are universally appreciated in fact adored, such of these things trees are one. And the case of trees is the best way to keep humans grounded and balanced. Hereby, one cannot compete with the world if one's foundation is not strong enough. Just as trees cannot grow in infertile soil similarly a human being cannot cope with society's hardships if his base is not strong enough. He may involve in immoral activities due to a weak base. Further, if a tree gets good soil and care, it gives back a lot of benefits. The same is the matter with humans if a human gets good company, then his good emotions and virtues get increased. So, man is known by the company he keeps.

Tree as an Embodiment of Human Unity

Another interpretation of the tree as an embodiment of human oneness emerges from the form of a postmodern allegory. All racial, national, religious, gender, or cultural biases are eliminated by the metaphorical portrayal of the tree. Because humanity is like a tree, with countries or people representing various branches and individual human beings representing the fruits and blooms. The tree metaphor depicts the

human race in a different light: as fruits sprouting from the same source of life. Although humans differ in shape, colour, and flavour, they are all fundamentally the same. Even though the people of today are dispersed and have become victims of selfishness and self-centeredness in this modern life, they are all the same and have the same roots under the canopy of humanity. Furthermore, the tree roots symbolize human foundation which is strongest when humans connect to the Divine as the source of happiness. Humans are more stable when this connection is strong. The trunk represents the physical/emotional body which, when supported by a solid foundation is not easily shaken by worldly turmoil. The crown symbolizes the human spirit of selfless giving to others just as the tree provides shade and fruits for all.

Furthermore, nature is the result, whereas God is the cause. God and Nature are one united whole, not two separate things. Nature is a divine representation of oneness and purity, a giving and receiving amongst all creatures within the cycle of Earth's life-sustaining activities. Humans are given life with the ultimate purpose of realizing God. Nature helps mankind in this endeavour. As a result, humans must use nature with care, with no intention of harming it but rather with gratitude, reverence, and pure, selfless Love. All of life's necessities are provided by the five elements that emanate from Nature. Earth, water, fire, air, and space are all pure in their natural state but impure human activities can contaminate them, causing harm to humans and other living things. It is the responsibility of humans to show respect and gratitude for nature's purity and to do their best to preserve it.

This is what the study looked at how the structure of a novel is the same as the structure of a tree. Each character is shown for the first time in a segment called Roots. This is when they are still separate and don't know each other but they are getting closer together, like how a tree's roots branch out from the trunk and then come back together. In the next part, Trunk talks about a time when many of them were in the same place, fighting logging companies as a group of activists. After Olivia's death, Crown says that they are like two new branches that have grown apart. Seeds look into the future and show what could fall from these branches and grow in the future. Most of Patricia's research and findings are about how trees work together. Her first big achievement was

finding out that trees can talk to each other and to other species. At first, people laughed at her for this, but it made her famous in the long run. Then she writes a book called *The Secret Forest* about it. "There are no individuals and aren't separate species. In a forest, everything is a forest. Competition can't be separated from endless flavours of cooperation" (Powers, 2018, p. 148). This cleverly combines the two images: the forest is always growing and branching out, but it is also a single, infinitely complicated creature. In the same way, even if the characters in a book have different stories to tell, they are all linked in some way, no matter how small. In the Trunk segment, Olivia, Nick, Douglas, Mimi, and Adam all band together, initially with Free Cascadia and subsequently as their own arsonist gang. However, ancillary individuals are also involved in the plot. At some point, all of the characters read Patricia's book *The Secret Forest*, Ray and Dorothy watch the activists' stories on the news, and Neelay appears to prevent Patricia's suicide by raising his arms and shouting at her when no one else in the room will. People, like trees, are connected at their roots and continuously in conversation with one another, affecting others with their own activities.

Conclusion

Postmodern Allegorical examination of Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) demonstrated how a basic method of allegory generates diverse interpretations from various living and nonliving elements, such as trees and other living creatures. This study addressed the subject of how images and metaphors are employed to convey postmodern allegorical meanings in *The Overstory* text. The work has a variety of metaphors and images, but the imagery of trees led the door to the exploration of numerous hidden meanings. And the characters' devotion to trees to preserve them from destruction, as well as their generational bond with trees, has various metaphorical connotations. For example, in our contemporary era, decreased worth of trees allegorically represents less value of humanity. The study demonstrated the characters' profound commitment to trees, and they banded together to defend the trees from devastation. However, the postmodern metaphor revealed that this contemporary society does not tolerate individual efforts such as this little group of individuals who

were bored of rescuing trees. Not only that, but the method of allegory added a slew of new meanings to trees. Furthermore, the postmodern allegorical viewpoint is unquestionably a symbolic story and a thought-provoking idea. However, postmodern allegory is inextricably linked to modern-day events. Postmodern allegory used metaphor and imagery to express hidden meanings throughout the narrative. And expose the harsh realities of civilization and postmodern quandaries. Nonetheless, this investigation revealed how spontaneous postmodern allegory is, and how entwined its tenets are with the reality of the contemporary world. Without the use of allegory, it is impossible to comprehend the fundamental meanings. The story explores several facets of the postmodern conundrum via the symbolism of trees. Because allegory is a genuine

technique of creative expression, trees are a crucial tool for the postmodern allegory in order to produce several meanings and features in the narrative. The muddled ideas and hazy obstacles succinctly reflect cathartic knowledge. Certain things have been discovered through studying postmodern allegory. Finally, this postmodern allegorical story revealed the true truths buried underneath the contemporary world's lifestyle. And contemporary man has completely lost the significance of both natural and human existence. This may give rise to a new, naked awareness that relates to oneself, one's neighbourhood, and one's country. Rather, it is via this lens that the varied meanings of trees and contemporary human behaviour towards trees, and even towards their own life problems, are revealed.

References

- Arentzen, T., Burrus, V., & Peers, G. (2021). *Byzantine Tree Life: Christianity and the Arboreal Imagination*: Springer.
- Boyne, R., Rattansi, A. (1990). The Theory and Politics of Postmodernism: By Way of an Introduction. In: Boyne, R., Rattansi, A. (eds) *Postmodernism and Society*. Communications and Culture. Palgrave, London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20843-2_1
- Cubitt, S. (2002). Marcel Duchamp. *Leonardo*, 35(1), 99-100.
- Dreyer, E. L. (2014). *China at War 1901-1949*: Routledge.
- Habermas, J. (1990). *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. MIT Press.
- Hooke, D. (2011). Christianity and the "Sacred Tree." *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, 228–250. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199680795.003.0012>
- Kavya, M., & Thomas, A. (2018). Kurt Vonnegut a postmodern-Genius excelling in black humor. *International Journal for Advance Research and Development*, 3(8), 166-168. <https://www.ijarnd.com/manuscripts/v3i8/V3I8-1173.pdf>
- Kerr-Koch, K. (2013). *Romancing fascism: Modernity and allegory in Benjamin, de Man, Shelley*: A&C Black.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press,
- Munir, U., & Sumaira, Q. S. (2021). Fragmentation and Postmodern studies: An analysis of Mohsin Hamid's Novel "How to get filthy rich in rising Asia." *International Journal of Linguistics and Culture*, 2(1), 53–65. <https://doi.org/10.52700/ijlc.v2i1.28>
- Owens, C. (1980). The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism. *October*, 12, 67. <https://doi.org/10.2307/778575>
- Pepper, S. (1999). *Civil war in China: the political struggle 1945-1949*: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Powers, R. (2018). *The overstory: A novel*: WW Norton & Company.
- Reat, N. R. (1975). The tree symbol in Islam. *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 19(3), 1-19.
- Sahoo, S. (2014). *The saint in the banyan tree: Christianity and caste society in India*. Taylor & Francis.
- Shah, A. (2015). David Mosse, The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.3901>
- Sheikh, D. K., & Dixit, A. K. (2015). Plants in the holy quran: a look. *World Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences*, 4(8), 715-738.
- Weatherley, R. (2007). *Politics in China since 1949: Legitimizing authoritarian rule*: Routledge.
- Whitman, J. (2000). *Interpretation and allegory: Antiquity to the modern period*: Brill.
- Zakaria, N. Z. Y., & Ibrahim, M. A. (2022). Interpretation of Plants in the Quran from Tafsir Al-Azhar and Tafsir Al-Misbah. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Islamic and Humanities*, 4(1), 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.55057/ijarih.2022.4.1.4>