

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Environmental apprehension has significantly disturbed space in some people's daily lives, filling psychologists' schedules worldwide. As stated in *Eco-anxiety: The Psychological Aftermath of The Climate Crisis*, while there has not been much data on how much of the population has been ill recently, experts say that as climate-related problems increase, so does the number of people experiencing environmental anxiety (Iberdrola.). *Eco-anxiety': Fear of Environmental Doom Weighs on Young People* explained that experts have warned that the climate crisis is now putting more strain on the mental health of children and young people (Gregory). Therefore, many people experience an overwhelming sense of fear and sadness, including the impact of moderate climate change and its effects on mental health, known as Eco-anxiety.

The American Psychological Association refers to Eco-anxiety as a chronic fear of environmental doom, ranging from mild stress to clinical disorders like depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide, and maladaptive coping strategies such as intimate partner violence and substance misuse (qt. in Dodds 222-26). Eco-anxiety could lead someone to panic attacks, a strong sense of guilt, sleeplessness, and paranoia due to trauma, anxiety, and depression. Adams, Kate., et al., in *Handbook of Climate Psychology* (CPA 22), states that fear and anxiety will alert someone to danger and make someone think about the action that will take.

The above explanation shows that extreme climate change, which has been consistently controversial in the news, has forced literary critics to analyze the natural environment and its impact on humans. Hence, many books or novels make climate change their main topic, such as J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam trilogy*. More recently, one of the books that contributed to talk about climate change is entitled *Weather*. *Weather* is a novel that combines everyday life and global crisis. However, the main thing in the spotlight here is the main character's life as someone with many identities. The main character is the wife of a husband who spends much time at home, a mother who always gives extra attention to her son, a sister to a younger brother who is recovering from drugs, and a citizen who lives in a world that is believed to be destroyed at any moment. Excessive feelings of fear of environmental calamity caused by the thought that the world will have no future for the next generations generate Lizzie's daily life as the main character in the story to be increasingly complex, coupled with her responsibilities as a wife and mother, older sister, and also the assistant of an environmental activist.

Lizzie Benson, an expelled student of a humanity major, narrates the *Weather*. She lives with her husband, Ben, and their son, Eli, while caring for her uninsured mother. She also spends most of her time helping her recovering addict brother. Another important character is Sylvia, Lizzie's former professor, a climate change activist voicing her concern about climate change through her doomsday podcast, *Hell and High Water*. She secured a job for Lizzie after dropping out of school at the library, but Lizzie must become her assistant. Lizzie needs to answer Sylvia's fans' letter, which is one of the causes of her anxiety

worsening. She has been occupied with her daily activities but pays excellent attention to Sylvia's fans, leading her to fear climate change. *Weather* tells the main character's everyday life, mainly on the emotional and psychological effects caused by living in a climate disaster, and how she faces social and personal problems during a changing environment.

American writer Jenny Offill wrote the novel *Weather*. She was one of the MFA program teachers at Brooklyn College, Columbia University, and Queens University. Offill is the co-editor, and Elissa Schappell worked on two anthology essays. Moreover, she wrote four children's books.

Jenny Offill wrote her first novel, *Last Things* (1999), and was one of the finalists in the *L. A Times First Book Award*. She is known for her *Dept. Of Speculation* (2014) novel was named one of the “Best Books of 2014” by the *New York Times Review*. This novel discusses a beguiling rumination of marriage life. Novel *Weather* (2020), published in 2020 and lauded by the *Boston Globe* as “tiny in size but immense in scope, radically disorienting yet reassuringly humane, strikingly eccentric and completely irresistible” (College). It was shortlisted for the 2020 *Women’s Prize for Fiction*. It was also one of the books in the 2021 *Longlist for the Andrew Carnegie Medals for Fiction and Nonfiction*.

In this research, the writer will analyze the Eco-anxiety experience of the main character in *Weather* by Jenny Offill. A journal article titled *Understanding Eco-anxiety: A Systematic Scoping Review of Current Literature and Identified Knowledge Gaps* states that climate change become one of the most severe global health threats of the 21st century. Even though Eco-anxiety is not yet considered a

diagnosable condition, recognition of Eco-anxiety and its complex psychological effects is increasing significantly among adolescents and young adults (Coffey et al.). The writer will specify that the main object of analysis is the main character's anxious thinking and behavior caused by climate change.

Although novels about the environment have been circulating for centuries, it is still rare to discuss the influence of environmental changes on human mental health as creatures that live side by side with nature. Therefore, the writer chooses the novel *Weather* because this novel provides the story of how the crisis of nature subconsciously burdens the human psyche. In addition, the writer has yet to find any previous research about Jenny Offill's *Weather* at Universitas Andalas. Therefore, the writer assumes that this work is considered new literary work and that this work has yet to be studied heretofore.

Based on the previous explanation, the writer analyses the details of Eco-anxiety experienced by the main character, Lizzie Benson. Likewise, the writer entitles this research as **An Analysis of Eco-Anxiety Experiences by The Main Character in *Weather* Novel by Jenny Offill**

1.2 Identification of the Problem

The author identifies that the main character of the novel, *Weather*, Lizzie Benson, experiences anxiety that extends throughout the book. Before it was identified that she suffered from eco-anxiety, the character of Lizzie had already been told to experience excessive anxiety during her narration in the story. Lizzie handles her role as librarian, wife, mother, and sister of a recovering drug addict brother. Lizzie also works as an assistant to her former professor to answer her fan

emails discussing climate change. All of these complex roles have raised her stress, worry, and fear. Her intelligence to capture the uniquely human experience of feeling living in a confusing and chaotic universe has caused her to experience eco-anxiety. It is caused by her ultimate concerns about climate change and environmental degradation.

Lizzie realizes the impact of human actions on the planet and feels overwhelmed and helpless in the face of the global crisis. Throughout the novel, Lizzie grapples with questions about living ethically and sustainably in a world headed for disaster. It makes Lizzie a person with a crisis of assuredness, where she prepares herself and her family by learning traditional survival skills. Community involvement in environmental destruction increases feelings of anxiety over her young son's future as long as she is close to him. Lizzie's anxiety disorder was preceded by financial difficulties faced by her family, marital problems she confronted with her husband, and raising a child. It is compounded by her knowledge of the ravages of nature and climate change so that Lizzie's anxiety disorder escalates into environmental anxiety or eco-anxiety. Furthermore, the writer will examine how climate change is pictured in the story, the causes of the main character experiencing environmental anxiety, and the coping mechanism she uses to defuse her eco-anxiety.

1.3 Review of the Previous Study

To intensify the quality of this research, the writer does library research related to psychological problems in literary works. The previous studies could be the medium comparison to get a deeper understanding and complete this research.

Nurul Azizah Batubara wrote the first study. Her thesis is *An Analysis of Climate Apocalypse in Jenny Offill's Novel Weather: An Ecocriticism Approach* (Batubara). This study uses the same work as the writer of the novel *Weather*. The writer uses the ecocriticism approach by Greg Garrard to reveal the climate apocalypse in the novel and the struggles that the main character experienced. In this study, she believes the frame of acceptance in the chaotic world of humans has become a route for humans to emerge more consciously aware of environmental issues. Likewise, this research helps the writer understand the ecological problems in the novel *Weather* from a different point of view.

Panu Pihkala writes the article from the Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science, HELSUS & Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki. Their report, *Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis: An Analysis of Eco-anxiety and Climate Anxiety* (Pihkala) stated that higher relative humidity, wind speed, and lower barometric pressure are associated with increased pain severity in people with long-term pain conditions. They assume that people suffer from environmental anxiety. The impact of climate change and other ecological crises on mental health is estimated to be very significant. Some formulations in anxiety theory help better understand the connection between environmental anxiety and people's experiences of overwhelm, frustration, and dissonance.

The journal *Eco-anxiety: How Thinking About Climate Change-Related Environmental Decline Is Affecting Our Mental Health* (Usher et al.) finds out that anyone living in a rural area of Australia is aware of the current impact of the unprecedented weather events that have caused the current drought, which in turn

has resulted in severe deterioration of the rural environment. The images of abandoned, windswept paddocks, dust storms, and the fear of fires as the remaining vegetation crushes. These conditions are of significant concern to many, not just farmers, as entire communities feel the effects of climate change.

The next Journal is *Ecological Grief and Anxiety: The Start of a healthy response to climate change* (Cunsolo et al.). This article, written by Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, explores the emotional toll of weather trade and environmental degradation on people and groups. The authors argue that grief and anxiety are healthy responses to the loss and uncertainty of weather exchange. Acknowledging and addressing these emotions is vital in constructing resilience and fostering collective action. They describe how people are experiencing "ecological grief," which emerges from the losses associated with environmental damage, consisting of the lack of species, ecosystems, and cultural practices.

Additionally, the thing examines how humans are also experiencing "ecological tension," a sort of anxiety that arises from worries about the destiny of the planet and the impact of weather change on society and the natural world. Those feelings can catalyze high-quality trade, motivating human beings to do so and painting toward an extra sustainable future. The article concludes by emphasizing the need for people, communities, and coverage-makers to know and address the emotional toll of weather exchange and ecological degradation and work towards constructing a more just and sustainable world.

The last study is also from Panu Pihkala in an article entitled *Eco-anxiety and Environmental Education* (Pihkala). This article examines the concept of

environmental emergency and its implications for environmental education. The writer examined various forms of Eco-anxiety, including anxiety states, repressed emotions, existential anxiety, and intense anxiety symptoms. Eco-anxiety is a pervasive phenomenon that often includes feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. He describes previous research on Eco-anxiety and ecological emotions, highlighting the need for further exploration in environmental education. This article emphasizes the importance of addressing ecological anxiety in ecological education and calls for further research and efforts. It highlights the need for educators to know more about environmental stress and ecological emotions and provides practical recommendations to address environmental focus in an educational setting.

1.4 Research Question

These research questions can help the readers to analyze the implicated depiction of mental health challenges arising from Eco-anxiety in *Weather*,

1. How is Eco-anxiety portrayed in the novel *Weather* by Jenny Offill?
2. What causes eco-anxiety in the main character of *Weather* and how does she overcome it?

1.5 Scope of the Research

This research objectively focuses on the character, Lizzie Benson, who suffers from Eco-anxiety in the novel *Weather*. Therefore, the writer limited this study to two discussions. Firstly, I analyzed how Eco-anxiety is presented in the novel through Eco-anxiety theory by Panu Pihkala. I also would investigate what

causes Lizzie to experience Eco-anxiety before exploring more. After that, I examined Lizzie's thoughts, behavior, and unconscious actions and how they affect her life. Secondly, I would study the coping mechanism she uses to cope with her anxiety caused by climate change. This research is not seen from the author's perspective, the aesthetic value of the work, or the reader's opinion because the problem revolves around Lizzie as the main character, a clear case of Eco-anxiety.

1.6 The Objective of the Research

This research aims to explore the phenomenon of Eco-anxiety experienced by the main character in the novel *Weather*. The writer examines the factors that cause this state and the coping mechanisms to mitigate its effects. By studying the main character's experience with eco-anxiety, this research offers valuable insights into the complexities of managing Eco-anxiety.

