
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Peril of Climate Change in Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020)

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ABSTRACT

The paper demonstrates the peril of climate change as represented in Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020). The paper sheds light on one of the environmental troubles that we are encountering at present – climate change. The paper highlights how the environment controls one's life. The analysis is conducted within the scope of ecocriticism. Demonstrating how the confabulation between literature and the environment might ardently modify society's behaviour to decrease the environmental problems that have outspread today is the main purpose of this study. The paper is significant as it pilots readers to ponder the practices of society in dealing with nature. The paper shows how Offill's *Weather* (2020) calls people to be responsible to other human beings and to the land. With a focus on the novel, this paper appraises three main themes that appear in *Weather* (2020). The themes concern the anthropocentric attitudes towards nature, the theme of determinism, and the repercussions of climate change on psychological well-being. The paper concludes that there are severe consequences of climate change if appropriate procedures are not taken. As an environmental novel, Offill's *Weather* (2020) delves into the ecological, political, economic, and technological grounds for climate change. The paper draws on many theories, including capitalism, existentialism, determinism, and climate anxiety. This paper opens new horizons for a forthcoming investigation in this regard.

KEYWORDS

Anthropocentrism, Climate change, Climate anxiety, Determinism, Ecocriticism.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, works of fiction wrestling with a burly portion of environmental deterioration and climate change have become prevalent. "Climate fiction" includes all literary works that integrate the atmospheric peril of climate change into their plots. Currently, novelists are paying attention to the horrendous climate crisis. As extreme weather whirls around the planet, writers find it imperative to address the world's most urgent issue in their fiction. The climate fiction genre has, at times, spookily predicted the future. Yet, it also mirrors our current reality. Some of the literary works that tackle environmental issues are *The High House* by Jessie Greengrass (2021), *The New Wilderness* by Diane Cook (2020), and Doris Lessing's *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter Griot and the Snow Dog* (2006).

Nature and literature go shoulder to shoulder. Literature is replete with works delineating the glamour of nature on the one hand and its atrocity on the other hand. William Wordsworth and William Blake have written many poems in which nature is the only topic. They both demonstrate picturesque images of nature. On the other hand, Jack London's "To Build a Fire" (1908) is a short story that elucidates the idea that nature has the upper hand and human beings are powerless. The story is about a man who walks in weather that is 75 degrees below zero, and he tries to survive.

There are many causes of climate change. Paehler (2007) proposed that the earth is getting warmer because of the increase of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere resulting from human activities, specifically the burning of fossil fuels. The consequences

of warming range from rising sea levels to droughts, wildfires, and extreme rainfall (Paehler, 2007). The repercussions of weather change are profound. According to the IPCC report (2007), climate change will increase starvation and increase human vulnerability to noxious chemicals (Graciano, 2010). Getting ready for the consequences that are inescapable will make people more adaptable and decrease the dangers (Di Paola, 2023), and this is the main purpose of Offill's *Weather* (2020).

The plot of *Weather* (2020) revolves around Lizzie. She goes with her employer to conferences. She also replies to her emails and posts, which in turn interposes her to the dilemma of climate change and its repercussions on mankind. Lizzie becomes preoccupied with the issue of climate change (Lu, 2020).

2. Materials and Methods

Critics have thoroughly investigated aspects of climate change as it appears in literature, focusing on the role human beings play in causing and increasing the environmental predicament and the fragile position of human beings in front of nature (e.g., Buell, 1995; Frederick, 2012; Jay et al., 2018; Trexler, 2015; Zhang, 2010). This paper follows a qualitative analytical approach to highlight the peril of climate change in Offill's *Weather* 2020.

The study has carried out a cross-sectional qualitative methodology. The study's several theoretical frameworks, including ecocriticism, capitalism, existentialism, determinism, and climate anxiety, are presented in this part. These theories help the researcher become familiar with the most recent information on the study's subject and enable the reader to critically assess the body of knowledge. In this study, the descriptive qualitative method was utilized.

2.1 Problem of the Study:

1. This study examines a recent literary work that addresses the wicked issue of climate change.
2. Environmental stewardship
3. Governmental and social accountability

2.2 Objectives of the Study:

The following research goals serve as the basis for this study:

1. Analyzing how climatic crisis is depicted in the chosen novel.
2. Investigating the intricacies of the interactions between natural and human systems as illustrated by particular instances of environmental calamity in the chosen novel.
3. Stimulating readers' ability to envision feasible, practical solutions to the climate catastrophe.

3. Review of Related Literature:

Global climate change currently represents the biggest hazard to human life. It is the outcome of anthropogenic activity, and its consequences—including sea level transgression, unnormal weather conditions, environmental catastrophes, starvation, and adverse economic conditions, among others—excessively harm the most helpless, least blameworthy. Michael E. Mann's "The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet" (2021) provides an insightful overview of the climate change movement, its difficulties, and the solutions needed to deal with them.

Many authors investigate the need for a complex fictional portrayal, given how complicated climate change is both an empirical and cultural reality (Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011). For instance, authors simply use the environment as a milieu and start to explore how it acts on the storyline, leading to unorthodox literary orbits and novelties (Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011). Antonia Mehnert (2016) notes that literature "gives insight into the ethical and social ramifications of this unparalleled environmental crisis, reflects on current political conditions that impede action on climate change, explores how risk materializes and affects society."

The purpose of Offill's *Weather* is to alert readers to the risks posed by climate change. This kind of work is equivalent to shouting at people from behind a glass wall: "Weather is a novel reckoning with the simultaneity of daily life and global crisis" (Jamison, 2020). Offill's book is radically condensed into short, snappy paragraphs that are stuck in the present tense and are each filled with odd observations: "Offill's book was dramatically pared down to taut, tight paragraphs trapped in the present tense, each packed with quirky observation and fantastic one liners" (Clanchy, 2020). The novel zigzags from the dazzling to the gloomy. The landscape of this work emerges before us through tears of hope and despair, exciting the senses and the imagination about what is conceivable, what is lovely, and what is frustrating about this world.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Anthropocentrism

The concern for the environment and the venture that the interminable misuse of nature negatively affects mankind have recently attracted the attention of the writers. One of these writers is Offill, whose *Weather* (2020) is a masterpiece of the climate fiction genre. Through the analysis of *Weather* (2020), the paper finds how the confabulation between literature and the environment might diligently change society's demeanor in regard to climate change. The paper finds that the goal of the novel is to lead readers to reconsider the practices of society in dealing with nature. As climate change may affect people psychologically, the paper draws that Offill's *Weather* (2020) is a far cry for people and those in charge to stop all that harms our land in order to shield ourselves from climate anxiety.

This sense of solicitude between literature and the environment has given rise to a contemporary kind of literary theory called Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is defined "as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis" (Buell, 1995, p.430). One of the canons for a work investigated through the ecocritical lens is human liability to the environment, or what is called anthropocentrism. The novel starkly demonstrates anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism means that man is the cause of ecological collapse and environmental damage (Xiujing & Yao, 2021). The novel highlights scenes of a misused and spoiled environment brought about by the belligerent attitude of humans. The novel exhibits awareness that the environment is exploited and ruined through man's activities. The theme of a misused environment is even more obviously conveyed in the story. Offill indirectly argues that all manifestations of development and modernity are anthropocentric. So, the novel urges that technology, development, and modernity should come under observance from environmentalists. A principal issue in regard to technological advances has been the buoyancy with which we have dealt with nature. According to Morsy (2023), Offill's novel insinuates that ecological impoverishment accrues from the anthropocentrically-driven activity of mankind. The novel hovers around the critical issue of anthropogenic environmental deterioration: "One day those machines are going to come and crush all of us," and "it'll just be like a big claw coming" (Offill, 2020, p.23). The author uses the allusion of the Great Flood to widen people's horizons regarding the effect of climate change brought about by their wrong activities directed towards nature. Visual metaphors for the implication of climate change are repeatedly conjured in the novel. Lizzie visualizes the apocalyptic scene: "When are the Days of Tribulation? Did Noah's flood cover the whole earth or just the places where people lived? Can pets be saved in Christ and go to heaven? If not, what will happen to them" (p.35).

4.2 Capitalism

The evil roots of anthropocentrism can be due to capitalism. Klein (2014) emphasized that "our economic system and our planetary system are now at war" (21). Offill correlates the pursuit of capitalism with climate change: "What will disappear from stores first ? What is surveillance capitalism? How can we save the bees?" (p.170). Offill's novel documents the sway of industrialization and development over nature (Morsy,2023). Another apparatus of capitalism is the discrepancy between the rich and the poor, which will be enhanced by climate change. The poor will face the brunt of the disaster, while the wealthy have money to move to the safest places. Those who contribute most to climate change are almost entirely impermeable to its adverse effects, while those who contribute the least are left without the means to survive. When Lizzie tells her supervisor that she wants to transfer her son and niece "somewhere colder" in search of security and shelter, Sylvia's answer is both sharp and pessimistic: "Then become rich, very, very rich" (p.127). Lizzie notices wealthy New Yorkers plan to transfer to areas that are less endangered by climate change, something she simply cannot sustain (Cords, 2021).

4.3 Determinism

An ecocritical analysis of this work demonstrates the theme of determinism, which falls under the umbrella of naturalism. In such a way, nature is seen as an annihilator and the cause of agony. The novel delivers the message that nature has the power to ruin and annihilate lives and possessions to the point that humans are portrayed as feeble and disabled. Offill's demonstrates determinism's hefty clout in her novel: "Then one day I have to run to catch a bus. I am so out of breath when I get there that I know in a flash all my preparations for the apocalypse are doomed. I will die early and ignobly" (p. 187). The theory of Charles Darwin also indicates the lower and fragile position of humans in the world and clearly stipulates that nature is indifferent to man, which again is a manifestation of the theme of determinism (Zhang, 2010). *Weather* (2020) presents the theme of "pessimistic, materialistic determinism" (Pizer,1984, p. 10). In many instances in the novel, Lizzie condemns the environment and sees it as a merciless scoundrel (Lin, 1989, p.528).

4.4 Eco-Anxiety

The novel delineates the psychological consequences of climate change on people (Doherty & Clayton, 2011). As a result of climate change, people may come down with eco-anxiety. Eco-anxiety means a panic of ecotage. Eco-anxiety is "a chronic fear of environmental doom" (APA, 2017). "Eco-anxiety" refers to constant concerns about the earth contemplating the forthcoming.

Eco-anxiety is delineated through many manifestations. Some of eco-anxiety's symptoms include disappointment, rage, uncertainty, existential fear, panic, and insomnia (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020). Existential fear, one of eco-anxiety's symptoms, is clearly demonstrated in *Weather* (2020):

This morning, Margot talked about the difference between falling and floating. With practice, she says, one may learn to accept the feeling of groundlessness without existential fear. This is akin to the way an experienced parachutist or astronaut might enjoy the wide view from above even as he hurtles through space. (p.121)

Eco-anxiety is entwined with insomnia. In *Weather* (2020), Lizzie highlights the issue of insomnia as a result of eco-anxiety: "But still, everyone I know is trying to sleep less. Insomnia as a badge of honor" (p.124). She describes how insomnia is a kind of torture: "He's not doing well with this sleep deprivation. There's a reason it's used as a tool of torture. But still, everyone I know is trying to sleep less" (p. 123). Another apparatus of eco anxiety is called eco-paralysis: "That night on the show, there's an expert giving advice about how to survive disasters, natural and man-made. He says it's a myth that people panic in emergencies. Eighty percent just freeze. The brain refuses to take in what is happening. This is called the incredulity response "(p. 55). Incertitude, volatility, and indocility seem to be important symptoms of eco-anxiety (Cunsolo et al., 2020). In the novel, Lizzie says, "When I come home, Henry is playing video games. I looked at the list of prepper acronyms I printed out this morning. FUD = Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt" (p. 162).

Because of eco-anxiety, people are becoming jittery about their future (Pihkala, 2018). In *Weather*, this is hinted at by Lizzie's brother, who has got addicted: "Henry had stopped working. He wasn't seeing anyone. He just stayed in that apartment in Staten Island, high, until he ran out of drugs and had to go down the street to get some more" (p.150). Anxiety is not the only negative emotion associated with climate change; hopelessness, anger, and grief are also discussed (Clayton, 2020). In the novel, Lizzie declares, "For a longtime, what I picked up on were the grief ones"(p. 169). The feeling of fear goes hand in hand with eco-anxiety (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2019). Throughout *Weather* (2020), Lizzie is preoccupied by the feeling of fear: "My # 1 fear is the acceleration of days. No such thing supposedly, but I swear I can feel it"(p. 18).

Eco-anxiety is reflected in the novel's fragmentation. The novel's fragmentation reflects the instability engendered by the fear of what climate change will bring about. Fragmentation reflects the protagonist's experience of living in a time in which distortion is prevalent. Lizzie's inner deliberations are not long but often short notes. The novel reveals the current condition of agitation and fragmentation. We're a disguised camera in Lizzie's head, hearing her meditations and reflections. Her meditations cover a wide variety, from worrying about her family to lamenting the awful state of our earth. Lizzie's fragmented thoughts indicate her concern for both her family and the planet. Lizzie is often obsessed with her interior landscape as well as the exterior landscape (Jamison,2020).

5. Conclusion:

The effects of climate change on people and nature are obvious. Unparalleled flooding, heat waves, and bushfires have tolled billions in damages: "The evidence of human-caused climate change is overwhelming and continues to strengthen... the impacts of climate change are intensifying across the country, and ... climate-related threats to Americans' physical, social, and economic well-being are rising" (Jay et al., 2018).

We acquire an unmistakable word from nature. We are destroying the natural world, and we will be held accountable. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2001) stated that human activities are the main cause of climate change (p.3). It is crucial that we keep heading towards a sustainable future that enables us to synchronize harmoniously with nature for both the present and future generations. No matter how far the human mind has progressed, man is still nature's inborn from cradle to death, and there is no way to challenge the principles of nature.

The basis of human evolution is technology. However, if we are not cautious in how we utilize technology, we will irresponsibly deplete the resources of nature and damage its delicate equilibrium (Morsy,2023, p.91). As a result, we will put the future generations in danger. We should now alter how we use technology and nature by discovering new methods of energy production: "The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between humans and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds, and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other" (Frederick,2012, p.147).

One of the largest difficulties surrounding the tremendous peril of climate change is the lack of discernable information available to people, especially those who are not scientifically educated. For this goal, climate fiction has come to provide a horrifying alert of climate change for their readers without being sophisticated or inapprehensible. The paper concludes that Offill weaved an unorthodox novel meant to represent the harshness and ferocity of climate change. Ricoeur (1991) once wrote: "The first way

human beings attempt to understand and to master the ‘manifold’ of the practical field is to give themselves a fictive representation of it” (p.176). *Weather* (2020) portrays a scientific repertoire interwoven in literary tapestry. *Weather* (2020) is found effective in stressing and addressing the urgency of approaching climate disasters. The novel is written to urge readers to take action to change their behavior, which harms our planet and causes climate change. *Weather* (2020) not only offers a powerful platform for probing worries about climate change but also gives people a method to add more voices to imagine potential solutions.

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