

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Research

Nature is essential to human life, and humans are essential to the preservation of nature. Herdiana & Najma (2019) stated that the mutual relationship is naturally shaped by nature and humans in the context of ecocriticism. It means that the human-nature relationship is interdependent. Nature is the shelter for all living things on its surface, especially humans. It has massive life-supporting necessities for humans such as water, oxygen, and other materials. The earth serves as a habitat and shelter for a vast diversity of living organisms, and it has been the cradle of life for millions of years. Therefore, humans need to build a relationship with nature so that natural sustainability can be maintained.

In building human-nature relationships, it cannot be separated from the role of humans themselves. As stewards of nature, humans have a duty to safeguard and preserve the environment for both current and future generations. This includes implementing sustainable practices, biodiversity conservation, and environmental justice advocacy to ensure that all creatures can live in harmony with nature. One of the challenges in building human-nature relationship is globalization which has led to various environmental challenges and consequences that cause climate change. Forests act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere and helping to regulate the planet's climate. When forests are cut down or burned, the stored

carbon is released into the atmosphere, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. Based on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in Rahman (2018), since the Industrial Revolution, atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations have increased by a third, and within the next 100 years, they are expected to double. Consequently, according to *World Wild Life*, since the start of the Industrial Revolution, glaciers have melted rapidly, with about 90% of glacier ice found in Antarctica and the remaining 10% in Greenland. As the result, glaciers have melted, broken off into the sea, and retreat from land areas which has an effect on the sea levels and human activities.

The United States is among the countries impacted by climate change. According to the *World Economic Forum*, North America is affected by large-scale blazes that cause heatwaves. The United States government spent about \$100 million for the reforestation of over 4 million acres of forest. It implies that trees are important thing in preventing climate change and strengthening the human-nature relationship. Therefore, the US Government is aware that planting trees is one way to prevent climate change. This movement also occurred in Indonesia, a country filled with tropical forests. According to the *Directorate General of Natural Resources and Ecosystem Conservation* (KSDAE), the community has carried out reforestation activities in the Mount Merbabu National Park area. This movement adopts the theme “*Gugur Gunung Mbangun Alam*” and was attended by the Vice Governor of Central Java, Taj Yasin Maimoen (Gus Yasin). Therefore, with this movement, it is hoped that

the water infiltration will increase so that there is no water shortage during the dry season and as an effort for the rehabilitation and conservation of the area. With the large number of environmental movements, it is hoped that more and more people will recognize the significance of protecting nature. In preserving nature, people need to be concerned with interdisciplinary such as ecology, literature, and ecocriticism.

In this case, ecocriticism approaches literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary perspective, integrating various sciences to analyze environmental issues and develop potential solutions for improving the current environmental conditions (Mambrol, 2016). Moreover, ecocriticism explores the connection between human and nature in literature, focusing on how environmental and cultural issues related to the environment are depicted and examined. The aim of ecocriticism is to analyze how people in society interact with and respond to nature and ecological matters, especially in preserving the environment. Furthermore, ecocriticism can explore more clearly about environmental problems nowadays which is rarely found in research on ecocriticism, but it is also very interesting on problems related to the environment today, especially regarding deforestation many of which are contained in *The Overstory*.

*The Overstory* (2018) is one of the literary works that pinpoint the ecocritical theme. It is a novel written by American author, Richard Powers that was published in 2018 and received critical acclaim, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in the same year. The novel explores themes related to trees,

forests, ecology, and the complex relationship between humans and nature. Throughout the novel, trees are portrayed not only as important components of nature but also as symbols of connectedness and strength. The characters in *The Overstory* come to recognize the profound impact of trees on their lives and the planet's ecosystem, leading them to become environmental activists and advocates for the preservation of forests. The book delves into topics such as deforestation, environmental activism, the effects of human actions on the environment, and the significance of caring for the environment. The story tells about the storylines of nine characters namely Nicholas Hoel, Olivia Vandergriff, Adam Appich, Mimi Ma, Douglas Pavlicek, Ray Brinkman, Dorothy Cazaly, Neelay Mehta, and Patricia Westerford. The novel weaves together several interrelated stories, all connected by the central theme of trees and the environment and exploring their individual experiences and connections to trees and forests.

Several compelling reasons for the writer's choice of this novel. First, this novel was written by the famous American novelist Richard Powers, considered one of the best American novels in 2019, and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, where there were a lot of environmental themes, particularly the importance of trees and forests. Second, this research analyzes the ecocriticism in the novel which has a unique narrative structure, weaving together disparate storylines and characters to explore diverse perspectives on nature and activism. Third, this novel has different character backgrounds, giving rise to responses from each character to individual environmental problems that may

relate to life in the reality.

Novels have unique narratives in preserving the environment. Through rich stories and vivid imagery, they raise awareness of pressing environmental issues, from deforestation to global warming. By immersing readers in the worlds they create, authors awaken empathy for nature and its inhabitants, fostering a deeper connection with the environment. These stories often feature characters involved in conservation efforts, inspiring readers to take action in their lives. Novels also function as catalysts for dialogue, sparking discussions that can result in collective action. Ultimately, through its ability to educate, empathize, inspire, and provoke, novels play a crucial role in preserving the natural world for future generations. All efforts to protect the environment can be described in a literary work as one of the right media to voice the human and nature connections.

Literary works have several forming elements such as imagination, thoughts, and emotions which are portrayed in written form. Klarer defines literature “as the entirety written expression that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word” (2004, p.1). The definition as Klarer said that the aesthetic or artistic text is added to distinguish from literary texts of daily use such as telephone directories, newspapers, and academic articles. Literary works can be distinguished based on genre, type of text, and discourse. A long-form work of fictional prose narrative or novel is the most widely favored.

According to Klarer (2004), the novel is one of the classic prose fictions

that relies on the development of well-defined characters, the exploration of various points of view, and plot. The essence of a novel lies in its ability to offer a multi-faceted exploration of the human experience, convey complex narratives, and engage readers on both intellectual and emotional levels. The basis of the novel is its foundational elements that provide structure, substance, and meaning to the story based on a plot.

Based on the explanation above, the writer uses the theory of Garrard's ecocriticism. An ecocriticism theory known as green theory claims that literature and other forms of cultural expression depict and engage with the natural world.

## **B. Questions and Scope of the Research**

### **1. Question of the Research**

Based on the background of the research, the problem in this research will be identified as follows:

- a. How does *The Overstory* novel reflect six parts of position in ecocritical analysis?
- b. How does *The Overstory* novel portray the significant implication of trees for the Earth?

### **2. Scope of the Research**

Based on the background above, the writer limited the research focus only to investigating the portrayal of human-nature relationships within *The Overstory* this included examining the various ways in which characters in the novel interact with the natural world, form connections

with trees and forests, and finding positions based on ecocriticism point of view by using Greg Garrard ecocriticism key concept of positions and the Earth. Garrard (2012) outlines positions as approaches to understanding human-nature relationships such as cornucopia, environmentalism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, ecomarxism, and Heideggerian ecophilosophy. These positions are used to analyze how literature engages with environmental themes and ideologies.

The dialogue from *The Overstory* is used by the writer in this analysis as examined in four chapters *Roots*, *Trunk*, *Crown*, and *Seed*. Every dialog and narration that has already taken place is examined concerning the issue of the human-nature relationship.

### **C. Objective and Significance of the Research**

#### **1. The Objective of the Research**

- a. To describe six parts of position in ecocritical analysis reflected in *The Overstory* novel.
- b. To determine the significant implication of trees for the Earth in *The Overstory* novel.

#### **2. Significance of the Research**

- a. Theoretical Benefit

Hopefully, this research can be helpful for those who are interested in literature and an ecocritical approach. This research enriches ecocritical discourse by applying ecocritical theory to a

specific text, demonstrating the relevance and effectiveness of ecocritical approaches in interpreting literature. In addition, this research can be a source of knowledge for anyone interested in exploring the novel.

b. **Practically Benefit**

This research offers insight into how literature can inspire readers to reevaluate their relationships with nature and participate in environmental activism.

**D. Operational Definition**

**1. Literature**

Literature is a human work that has values of beauty and imagination which must be seen through the aesthetic, moral, and conceptual values of literary works in forms of works such as poetry, prose, drama, and movies.

**2. Human**

Human is a creature that characterized by their intelligence and capacity to influence other creatures, and experience five stages of life such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, and old age which each mark significant phases of physiological and psychological development.

**3. Nature**

Nature denotes the physical world and its natural occurrences, including humans, plants, animals, landscapes, and natural processes, which exist independently of human influence, serving not only human requirements



but also the needs of other living organisms.

#### **4. Human-Nature Relationship**

Human-nature relationship refers to the intricate and evolving interaction between people and the natural environment, highlighting how humans perceive, interact with, utilize, and impact the world around them influenced by cultural, social, economic, and technological factors.

#### **5. Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism refers to the interdisciplinary field that examines the connection between literature, culture, and the nature which explores how literature can contribute to environmental awareness, activism, and sustainability.

#### **E. Systematization of the Research**

In this research, the systemization of this research is intended to make it easier for the readers to understand this research and to make this research in a good composition. The writer organizes the research into five chapters, structured as follows:

In Chapter I, the writer provides a comprehensive introduction to the research, starting with an exploration of the research background and its contextual relevance. This is followed by clear research questions and their scope. Additionally, this chapter outlines the specific objectives and significance of the research, ensuring the readers understand its purpose and potential impact. In addition, operational definitions are defined for ease of

understanding, and the systematization of the research is structured to lead the reader in comprehending the research. Finally, this chapter involves an important foundation and setting the stage for the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter II, the writer discusses the existing literature on ecocriticism, emphasizing core principles and key concepts. The discussion includes an examination of ecology and its relevance in ecocritical discourse, as well as a study of the relationship between human and nature depicted in literary and cultural contexts. In addition, the chapter reviews previous studies that have contributed to the understanding of ecocriticism and its application in literary analysis. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundations of ecocriticism and its implications for understanding human interaction with the environment. Overall, this chapter provides a basis for placing research within the broader framework of ecocritical studies.

In Chapter III, the writer presents the methodology used in this research, which includes the research method chosen, the type of research, procedures, data collection and analysis techniques, and data sources. This chapter outlines the systematic approach adopted to conduct the research, detailing the specific method used to collect and analyze the data. In addition, this chapter provides insight into the general strategies that guide the research. Furthermore, this chapter explains the procedures followed in data collection and analysis, ensuring transparency and rigor in the research process. Finally, this chapter serves as a comprehensive guide to the methodological framework used in this research, providing clarity on how data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

In Chapter IV, the writer presents an analysis of data collected from the novel “The Overstory.” This chapter provides a detailed description of the data collected and presents the research results obtained from the novel. It provides insight into the themes, characters, and narrative elements explored in “The Overstory,” along with their implications and significance. Additionally, the chapter addresses the interpretation of the data, offering a nuanced understanding of the novel’s content and broader implications. Finally, this chapter serves as a comprehensive examination of the data extracted from “The Overstory.”

In Chapter V, the writer presents the conclusions drawn from the study, providing a concise overview of the research findings. Additionally, this chapter offers a summary of the key points discussed throughout the research process. Furthermore, suggestions for future research directions are presented, highlighting potential areas for further investigation or exploration. By providing these suggestions, the writer hopes to encourage further research in the field. Finally, this chapter serves as the conclusion of the research, covering the core of the main findings and providing guidance for future scientific endeavors.