

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Cutting down trees to produce wood used for construction, paper, logging and other activities that kill trees has the potential to harm the ecosystem and the environment as a whole. Deforestation is the removal of forests (Derouin 2019, 51-52). Deforestation can involve the conversion of forest lands such as agriculture, animal husbandry, or the use of urban planning. Cutting down trees can cause loss of animal habitat, which can damage the ecosystem inside. Humans cut down trees in the forest to make their trunks into the wood and create new areas for agriculture or housing. They cut down trees to make something from every part, whether it is medicine or other human needs. When areas where species live and change in other ways that interfere with their conditions for survival, this condition arises as an ecological crisis (Kahn 1999, 57). When this condition is needed people can protect it by carrying out environmental activism, to reduce the impact of natural damage.

Environmental activism is the practice of protecting the natural environment for the benefit of the environment and humans (Clinton L. Beckford 2010, 57). Environmental activism here can reduce or eliminate pressure on the environment and which aim at making the use of natural resources more efficient and trying to reduce natural damage caused by humans. Natural damage caused by humans has made some people aware of this action and do something that can prevent or protect nature in various ways. They take precautions or protection because they have a relationship with nature that is based on

environmental wisdom. Environmental activities will always be closely related to environmental wisdom. Environmental wisdom is all forms of knowledge, beliefs, understanding, insight, and habits or ethics that guide human behavior in maintaining people's behavior to manage and use the environment wisely (Callicott 1982, 60). Environmental wisdom is closely related to cultural values, especially religion, law, and norms that exist in a society that has always been maintained for generations. “Environmental wisdom makes life easier because it contains experience, knowledge, belief, and guides people to distinguish truth from falsehood” (Clinton L. Beckford 2010, 30).

Every culture has a perspective on trees as something special and gives a lot of strength. Like, in In Northern Norway there is midnight sun in summer; summer is literally one long day and evening that never turns into night. In winter, the sun never rises above the horizon, though the sky is sometimes lit by northern lights (Torkar 2014). Norwegians hold nature in high esteem. Norwegian nature can be just as wild as it is beautiful. The weather may change quickly in the mountains from bright sunshine to rain, dense fog and strong winds. It is therefore important to respect nature and be careful. In the mid-eighteenth century America's view of nature was characterized by a duality that, arguably, still exists: on one hand, Americans are proud that North America's wilderness is vast, beautiful, and rich; on the other hand, they boast of their ability to conquer, control, and change nature to suit their own economic and political goals (Clinton L. Beckford 2010, 10). Some Americans, especially white people, believe that some tree has many strengths

and benefits, but some of them also do not believe in it because according to them, thinking like that can be like a fool. In ancient China, the concept of harmony (he) and balance (being) with nature is the desired practice. For Blacks or Africans, Americans' nature is described as an entity that plays an important role in life. Living close to nature makes them very dependent on nature, especially trees. The tree for them is life. Trees can provide a life for humans and other living creatures, that is why trees are very important for their lives (Cavers 2009). Environmental wisdom or local wisdom can be one of the reasons to encourage people to do environmental activities. Beliefs, values are inculcated and the norms that exist in culture, ethnicity, or race, and principles are the supporting factors for a change in one's outlook and attitude (Botcheva 1996)

Environmental wisdom has an important role in influencing someone to carry out environmental activities in maintaining balance and harmony due to deforestation (Clinton L. Beckford 2010). To carry out environmental activities requires an intention from the individual. Before reaching the point of intention, each individual has a diverse background that will influence their intention to do something such as experience, knowledge, beliefs of a place (Clinton L. Beckford 2010, 12). From all that we can understand that there is a process experienced by individuals before it becomes a good attitude and behavior. Nature here depicted through trees, planted by ancestors to provide a life for their descendants. Through the tree, they can communicate with the spirits of ancestors or people who have died, and can provide many benefits for humans. Humans and nature are interconnected with each other. Although nature provides many benefits, when nature itself is damaged,

nature needs the role of humans in maintaining and preserving it. This is because humans play the role of protecting, destroying, and dominating nature for their personal gain is said to be the main cause of the current condition of the earth (Buell 1995.). This is related to how the relationship between nature and humans can be described.

This criticism shows how important it is to avoid such behavior towards nature which only brings destruction to the earth, which suggests that the study of literature relating to the environment must be discussed. Human ignorance of the environment itself can also be a source of damage to nature and the environment. Therefore, human actions and awareness can be considered as one of the solutions to restore environmental damage or destruction that occurs in nature (Buell 1995.). Many writers or researchers have included aspects of nature and the environment in their works. Those leads to the emergence of Ecocriticism as a critical theory to make or show nature as part of a prominent story. Ecocriticism itself is an earth-centric approach used to examine the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Cheryll Glotfelty 1996., 58). Ecocriticism is a theory that tries to examine how nature is represented in the literary work and the ideology behind it.

The Overstory (2018) is a novel by Richard Powers published in 2018 by WW Norton. This is the twelfth novel of Powers. *The Overstory* by Richard Powers wins the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. “*The Overstory*,” by Richard Powers, about the beautiful life and worrying death of the tree, has won this year's Pulitzer Prize for fiction. This award marks a new high point in the growing popularity of environmental novels. Richard Powers was

inspired to write work while teaching at Stanford University after he discovered the giant redwood tree for the first time.

The novel revolves around nine Americans who experience their unique life with trees and bring a few of them together to overcome and protect the forest from deforestation. There are nine characters in this novel who have a unique relationship with the trees that sometimes cause tragedy or safety to them. Nick Hoel, Olivia Vandergriff, and Mimi Ma are among the characters in the novel. They have a very large trust in the trees, they have been saved by the tree from an accident, and from hunger that they feel very indebted to the tree. The characters are brought together on a mission to protect forest from damage, where the tree is the main object to be cut down. In this case, trees and their characters are told by this novel from the Western and non-Western cultural perspectives and only three main characters in this novel want to fight to protect and prevent direct damage.

Numerous studies have examined the representation of nature and how most ideologies show how humans like to describe nature as a threat. Whereas characters actions against nature have a role in the process of achieving harmony between humans and nature, as most studies focus on grouping characters based on their role in the environment without examining more about the effects caused by the behaviors or attitudes exhibited by them. Some of the studies are *An Analysis of Environmental Issue using Ecocriticism in James Cameron's Film Avatar* by Rohmah Romadhon, *The Struggle of Mullet Finger to Protect Burrowing Owls from Habitat Destruction in Carl Hiassen's Hoot* by Fawzia Noor Ummah.

In this study the writer tried to analyze not only how important the role of humans and the relationships that occur between humans and nature, animals or plants themselves, but in this study the writer tried to analyze how nature is represented by cultural differences with their belief, experience, knowledge and awareness that encourage them to play an important role in protecting nature and how it affects themselves.

This study will further analyze how the perspective of characters in treating their environment can actually be used as a solution to the imbalance between nature and humans in creating a harmonious world. As stated earlier that ecocriticism will be applied in this study to examine the relationship between nature and humans. This study will apply theoretical frameworks proposed by Lawrence Buell in examining how literature represents the natural environment in this novel.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

The problem statement of this research focused on:

1. How is the significance of nature in the perspective of Western and non-Western characters in *The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers?
2. How do the characters perspective influence environmental activism to bring back the stability of ecosystem described in *The Overstory* (2018)?

1.3. Objective of the Study

1. To explain representation of nature through different cultural perspective and the relationship between nature, culture, and human in a novel titled *The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers.
2. To explain the role of humans in creating harmony and balance between nature and humans, with environmental wisdom influence the characters intention to do the environmental activity.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to the expansion of ecocritical studies in various genres of literary works. This study will provide some important information about how and what aspects of the novel can be analyzed through the perspective of ecocriticism and how different culture perspective toward tree or nature with personal experience, awareness, belief, and knowledge turns out to be the biggest factor or motivation in creating balance and harmony between humans and nature.

This research can provide many benefits for writers or readers in recognizing the relationship between humans and nature, how nature are portrayed through a different culture and personal experiences from every characters. And also how to provide good education for future generations about the importance of protecting nature and carrying out environmental activities. This study can also be a reference for further studies in analyzing

other eco-critical studies and motivating readers to do more research on the same object or other objects using this ecocritical study.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

Deforestation: “Permanent logging is done to make space for something other than the forest. Such as, land clearing for agriculture or grazing, or using wood for fuel, construction or manufacturing” (Derouin 2019).

Ecocentrism: “Focuses on the interests of all species and natural features of Earth's ecosystems, refusing to place any aspect or species above the others” (Buell 1995.)

Ecosystem Stability: “Biotic components include producers, consumers, and decomposers and their abiotic components are in a balanced amount so that interactions between components can run well” (Clinton L. Beckford 2010)

Environmental Activism: “Activities aimed at suppressing or stopping the number of damage to nature and beyond”. (Claudio D. Rosa 2019).

Environmental Wisdom: “The explicit knowledge that emerges about nature in local systems”.(Mike Plavcan 2004)