



# Eco-Anxiety And Resilience: Examining Climate Change And Mental Health In Jenny Offill's *Weather*

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During the last few decades, the environment has posed a significant threat to human society and the planet. The extensive misuse of natural resources has brought humanity to the brink of ecological disaster. Rainforests are being cut down, fossil fuel reserves are rapidly depleting, seasonal cycles are disrupted, ecological catastrophes occur frequently and our environment is increasingly under threat. Under these dire circumstances, a new approach to reading nature writing emerged in the last decade of the 20th century, known as eco criticism. This worldwide movement arose in response to humanity's anthropocentric attitude of dominating nature.

Eco criticism is an interdisciplinary framework that examines the relationship between literature, culture and the environment, focusing on how texts engage with ecological concerns. It explores the ways in which literary works reflect, critique, and influence human perceptions of nature and environmental challenges. Climate change, as one of the most pressing global challenges, has significant environmental, social and psychological implications. In the context of climate change, ecocriticism provides valuable insights into the cultural and psychological dimensions of environmental crises and their representation in literature. Climate change increasingly impacts mental health. Literary works addressing climate change often grapple with themes such as eco-anxiety, climate grief and the ethical dilemmas of environmental stewardship. Through these narratives, authors invite readers to confront the complexities of ecological degradation and humanity's role in addressing it.

This paper examines these themes through Jenny Offill's novel *Weather*, a concise yet profound exploration of human psychology in the face of environmental crisis. Offill's fragmented narrative style mirrors the disjointed and overwhelming nature of contemporary climate concerns, offering a deeply personal lens into the protagonist's growing anxiety as she navigates daily life amidst looming ecological uncertainty.

The novel captures the subtleties of solastalgia—the distress caused by environmental change—and its ripple effects on relationships, work, and identity. Offill's protagonist reflects the struggles of many who feel paralyzed by the scale of the climate crisis while grappling with the responsibility to act. The narrative also touches on the psychological burden of preparing for an uncertain future, portraying mental health as an integral yet often overlooked aspect of climate change discourse.

Through *Weather*, Offill provides a nuanced depiction of how individuals internalize global issues, blending humour, insight, and vulnerability. The novel underscores the importance of addressing mental health in the broader conversation about climate resilience and adaptation. This study highlights how literature can provide a space for empathy, understanding and collective reflection, empowering readers to confront both the external and internal challenges posed by climate change.

**Keywords:**

Ecocriticism, Climate Change, Mental Health, Eco-anxiety, Solastalgia, Environmental Literature, Psychological Resilience.

Climate change refers to the long-term alterations in Earth's temperature and weather patterns. While some of these changes occur naturally due to phenomena such as volcanic eruptions or solar variations, the primary driver of climate change since the 1800s has been human activity, particularly the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. These actions have led to the release of greenhouse gases, forming a thermal blanket around the Earth and accelerating global warming.

In recent years, literature has emerged as a significant medium for engaging with the complex realities of climate change. The development of ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary approach that studies the relationship between literature and the environment, has allowed scholars to investigate how narratives reflect and shape ecological awareness. With the intensification of environmental degradation, emotional responses such as eco-anxiety and solastalgia have gained prominence. These psychological states reflect the mental toll of living amidst a changing planet, and literature has increasingly taken up the task of giving voice to these concerns.

This paper examines Jenny Offill's novel *Weather* through the lens of ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary approach that analyzes literature's engagement with environmental issues. Offill's work delves into eco-anxiety, climate grief, and solastalgia presenting a fragmented narrative that mirrors the fragmented mental states of those grappling with the climate crisis. By analyzing *Weather*, this study highlights the complex interplay between environmental uncertainty and mental health while emphasizing literature's role in fostering resilience and collective reflection.

Ecocriticism emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the anthropocentric exploitation of nature. Scholars in this field examine the representation of ecological issues in literature and culture, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being. Ecocritical analyses reveal how literary works critique environmental degradation and offer new perspectives on sustainability, resilience, and ecological ethics.

In the context of *Weather*, ecocriticism provides a valuable framework for exploring the psychological dimensions of climate change. Offill's novel engages deeply with ecological concerns, reflecting contemporary anxieties about the future and the ethical dilemmas of environmental responsibility. Through its protagonist's experiences, *Weather* illustrates how the climate crisis manifests in personal and social relationships, reinforcing the urgent need to address the mental health impacts of environmental change.

Climate change is real and it poses a serious threat to our planet's future. For some people, this growing concern can affect their mental health, leading to a condition known as eco-anxiety. Let's take a look at what eco-anxiety means, what causes it, its symptoms, and how we can manage it while still doing our part to protect the environment.

Though eco-anxiety is a fairly new term, it has already become an important topic for many psychologists and is something that some people deal with every day. Natural disasters, like the massive wildfires in Australia and very recently in America or Cyclone Idai that destroyed the city of Beira in Mozambique, are becoming more intense and more common because of climate change. These events have left many people feeling anxious and helpless, even if they don't realize it's actually eco-anxiety.

Eco-anxiety is also a chronic fear and distress about the ecological crisis, while climate grief involves mourning the loss of natural environments and biodiversity. Both phenomena are central themes in *Weather*. The novel's protagonist, Lizzie, struggles with an increasing sense of dread as she becomes more aware of the impending ecological collapse. Her work is answering emails for a climate change podcast exposes her to distressing information, amplifying her anxieties about the future.

Offill's exploration of eco-anxiety is evident as Lizzie reads distressing emails from listeners of a climate podcast she helps manage: *One guy says, 'I am afraid the sun will explode and none of this will*

matter,' and I write back, 'Yes, that's true, but not for five billion years'" (Offill, 22). These brief yet poignant interactions reflect the absurdity and heaviness of coping with looming existential threats. They also show how humor, a tool of psychological resilience, can help people maintain emotional equilibrium in a chaotic world.

Lizzie's psychological turmoil reflects the broader societal unease surrounding climate change. Her concerns about preparing for an uncertain future-stockpiling supplies, worrying about the fate of her son, and contemplating worst-case scenarios-are emblematic of the growing public distress over environmental instability. Offill captures the emotional weight of ecological awareness, portraying Lizzie's internal struggles as a microcosm of a larger global crisis.

Solastalgia, a term coined by environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht, describes the distress caused by environmental change and the loss of familiar landscapes. Unlike nostalgia, which longs for a distant past, solastalgia is a present and persistent feeling of displacement due to environmental degradation. In *Weather*, Offill conveys solastalgia through Lizzie's heightened sensitivity to climate related news and her increasing feelings of helplessness.

The novel's fragmented structure reinforces the sense of disorientation that accompanies solastalgia. Offill's short, vignette like passages mimic the disjointed nature of modern life, where environmental concerns permeate everyday experiences. This narrative style effectively captures the psychological fragmentation experienced by those struggling to reconcile their daily routines with the looming specter of climate catastrophe.

Despite its heavy themes, *Weather* employs humor and irony as coping mechanisms. Offill's protagonist often responds to existential concerns with dry wit and sardonic observations. This approach highlights the absurdity of attempting to maintain normalcy in the face of overwhelming uncertainty. By incorporating humor, Offill underscores the paradox of modern existence balancing deep concern for the planet with the necessity of continuing everyday life.

Humor in *Weather* serves as a form of psychological resilience, allowing characters and readers alike to process anxiety without succumbing to despair. It suggests that while the climate crisis is an existential threat, there is still room for human connection, laughter, and the search for meaning in an uncertain world.

Resilience, the ability to adapt to adversity and uncertainty, is a key theme in *Weather*. While Lizzie experiences eco-anxiety and solastalgia, she also demonstrates resilience by seeking knowledge, engaging in conversations about preparedness, and maintaining her relationships despite her fears. This portrayal aligns with psychological studies on climate resilience, which emphasize the importance of social support, education, and proactive engagement in fostering mental well-being amidst environmental crises.

Offill's novel suggests that confronting climate anxiety requires both individual and collective efforts. Lizzie's journey reflects the broader societal challenge of finding balance between awareness and action, fear and hope. *Weather* encourages readers to recognize the psychological toll of climate change while also exploring ways to cultivate resilience in the face of ecological uncertainty.

Literature plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse on climate change and mental health. Novels like *Weather* provide a space for empathy, reflection, and discussion, allowing readers to engage with environmental issues on a deeply personal level. Through its intimate portrayal of eco-anxiety, Offill's work humanizes the climate crisis, making it more relatable and immediate.

By addressing mental health in the context of climate change, *Weather* contributes to a broader conversation about the need for psychological support in times of ecological upheaval. The novel highlights the intersection of environmental and mental well-being, advocating for a more holistic approach to climate adaptation that includes emotional resilience as a key component.

Jenny Offill's *Weather* offers a profound exploration of eco-anxiety, solastalgia, and psychological resilience in the face of climate change. Through its fragmented narrative, dark humor, and intimate character study, the novel captures the complexities of living in an era of ecological crisis. By applying an ecocritical lens to *Weather*, this paper underscores the importance of literature in

addressing both the external and internal challenges posed by environmental change.

As climate change continues to shape human experience, literature will remain a vital tool for fostering awareness, emotional resilience, and collective action. Offill's novel serves as a reminder that while the future may be uncertain, engaging with ecological concerns—through literature, conversation, and personal reflection—can empower individuals to navigate the challenges ahead with greater understanding and resilience.

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