

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Femininity or ways of being a woman have long been constructed in traditional gender roles. Women are always perceived as submissive, emotional, responsible for domestic issues and always correlated with nature. Meanwhile, men are always perceived as dominant, rational, and correlated with culture (Buckingham-Hatfield 2000). Gender stereotypes and practices also significantly affect how women and men think about specific issues and respond to their practical necessities (Bloodhart and Swim 2020).

Gender is culturally constructed and intricately connected with social structures and leadership status (Ayman, Korabik, and Morris 2009). The deeply engrained negative attitudes and stereotypes implemented in society are among the major obstacles to progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. Even though diversity and equality are now emphasized in school, stereotypes about gender are still apparent in children's novels (Filipović 2018). Such stereotypical gender norm depictions caused an imbalanced representation of male and female characters, which impacted how young children view and define gender (McCabe et al. 2011).

Furthermore, the fact that these gender differences in behavior are frequently taken for granted in our daily lives impacts how we act regarding environmentally relevant actions. This can be seen from how it has historically been considered acceptable for women to be more involved in maintaining the

environment's sustainability. One of the most widely used concepts that connect women and nature is “Mother Nature” (Roach 2003). On the opposite, men are more likely to be involved in life-destroying activities such as hunting. These are potential setbacks in the liberation process from patriarchal norms. These complex ideas influence younger readers to act as they are arranged by society through the contexts of femininity and masculinity. Feminine qualities such as nurturing, submissive, and masculine traits such as being dominant and oppressive are still used as a standard of qualities a particular gender should possess (Plumwood 1993).

Regarding the issue, the concept of “Mother Nature” is very common across cultures. Even in the modern age, these “Mother Nature” figures are apparent in the form of environmental activists. One of the young activists who is globally known for her movement that addresses the climate change issue is Greta Thunberg. She is a Swedish-born environmental activist named Time Magazine's Person of the Year in December 2019. At 16, she was the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (Ryalls and Mazzarella 2021). She was also the one who started the “Skolstrejk för Klimatet” (School Strike for Climate) or, as it is more widely known, the “Friday for the Future” movement in 2018. Her actions encouraged many students worldwide to undertake their own “Fridays for the Future.” These protests were undertaken in Belgium, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Finland, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands. Although her actions draw criticism, Greta Thunberg has changed some people's views and actions toward climate change. She started environmentally friendly practices while proving that

no one is too young to make a difference. Her influence was known as the “Greta Effect” (Tikkanen 2020).

Children are perceived in society as naturally innocent, and they become corrupted by adults and the world. Due to these reasons, they are no longer silencing their voices on what is considered “good.” Their positive attributes restore the moral well-being of adults and society. They also projected a strong image and acted as a force of “good.” Regardless of whether they are identified as male or female, they project a strong image while challenging gender stereotypes (Kearney 2005). They are becoming spokespersons to warn about the environmental impacts that have occurred around the world. As the generation most affected by the climate crisis, they actively participate in actions to raise awareness about the environmental balance (Ryalls and Mazzarella 2021).

Just like gender attributes are always associated with women, and how children should behave, Greta Thunberg's representations are considered somewhat contradictory. Despite her young age, her powerful messages leads to an alternative portrayal of women's empowerment. This is different from the construction of femininity, which is based on a feminine quality where women are more likely to be submissive and silent. Thunberg's alternate empowerment was based on a positive representation of her Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis. Her ASD is regarded as a potentially progressive "superpower." Her whiteness and age validate her position as the iconic voice of the climate crisis movement, thus undermining the necessity for cooperative action to fight climate change (Ryalls and Mazzarella 2021).

The rising international issue of the environment is one reason to think that it is impossible to separate ourselves from nature. The importance of living in harmonious coexistence needs to be promoted. In addition, every creature on the planet, whether human or nonhuman, plays a vital role in the environment. Therefore, it has made many people put their hope in young people to promote ecological awareness, especially in Indonesia. Most of Indonesia's population comprises young people, who are capable of inspiring environmental awareness. They also expect the younger generation to be more engaged and concerned with environmentally friendly practices. Participation through writing, research, campaigns, or voicing it directly to the government is also encouraged. Indonesian climate activists Melati and Isabel Wijsen are known for their efforts to reduce single-use plastic bags in Bali. In 2013, Melati and Isabel Wijsen, at the ages of 10 and 12, began the campaign Bye Bye Plastic Bags. This campaign was inspired by similar campaigns in other regions of the world and the problem of plastic waste in Bali (Wijsen and Wijsen 2016). This campaign got international support and convinced the island's governor to ban plastic bags by 2018 (Lestari, Fitri, and Hikmawan 2021). Despite their young age, their efforts and struggles are praiseworthy and inspire others to do the same. As quoted by Isabel in her TED talk, "Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're too young or you won't understand," (Wijsen and Wijsen 2016).

The strong associations between gendered environmental-relevant action on preserving nature and women depicted as empowering figures have been among the most compelling discoveries. However, there is only a little research on the

relationships between the issues in children's literature. Meanwhile, numerous studies on women and femininity have been done for a long time. After the rise of awareness of women's marginalization in many aspects of human existence, the early stages of the feminist movement in the Western world in the nineteenth century might be seen as a significant motivator of its consciousness (Buckingham-Hatfield 2000). These women's social and biological roles are crucial factors to consider when considering awareness of various environmental issues. Breaking these dualisms regarding men/women and culture/nature involves affirming and reconceptualizing nature. The potential to develop a genuinely democratic and ecological culture that transcends dualism is becoming increasingly important in the future (Plumwood 1993).

In the modern age, the legacy of male dominance throughout history has profoundly impacted our everyday lives. Even when gender equality seems no longer an issue, the internalization of the patriarchal perspective continues in various forms. Therefore, the concept of male dominance has fueled feminist movements to seek equal rights for women. These dominant social, political, and moral frameworks affect our views, knowledge, and actions. The concept derives from Greek philosophy, which positions men as superior to women. In this philosophy, men were more associated with culture, whereas women were associated with nature. Men were less bound to nature and thus could exploit it; on the other hand, women were perceived as nurturing and acted as caretakers in any given situation. Men's detachment from nature was regarded as a virtue because it allowed them to build a relationship with nature in which nature served what men

wanted. On the other hand, women were thought to be biologically inferior to men but emotionally closer to nature (Buckingham-Hatfield 2000).

There were many discoveries concerning the relationship between women and nature. It existed to create academic respectability for a new generation of literary academics who interpreted literary texts concerning the environment (Gaard 2009). Meanwhile, ecofeminism combined the basic tenets of ecocriticism and feminism. Ecofeminist concepts advance an egalitarian society where women and nonhuman natures are viewed as creatures with their own goals and needs. Radical ecology, deep ecology, and feminism are the basis of ecofeminism. Ecofeminists also openly disagree with traditional environmental movements and women's struggles. They wanted to increase the awareness of environmental issues and women's struggles because of the multiple connections between women and the land or nature (Mukherjee 2013).

Nature's dominance is an important and challenging breakthrough for feminist theory. Besides, feminists have experienced a significant struggle, alteration, and development concerning ecological issues. A particularly problematic and controversial fact is that the problem of nature is so inextricably linked to the problem of gender. Due to their intersections with various forms of dominance and conceptions of race and class, these traditional gender roles have tremendously promoted the establishment of the dominant party in a Western patriarchal culture. Since the feminist movement in the late 1960s, there have been several discussions about the rights and roles of women as well (Catalano 2002, 45).

Women and nature had embraced various types of oppression. Its given concept arose from the oppression of women and how in many interpretations, nature has always been undervalued in so many aspects. Nature is always associated with emotions, animality, nonhumans, the sphere of irrationality, and its complete madness. As a result, a comprehensive account of oppression is difficult to obtain and must rely heavily on other forms of oppression. Not to mention it also has been a belief that was integrated into the core. In order to escape this dilemma and confusion about its true meaning, Val Plumwood, in her book *Feminism and The Mastery of Nature* (1993), suggested a theory later called ecological feminism (Plumwood 1993).

The masculine presence heavily influenced Western society in many accounts of the area. As a result, gender norms assigned women the role of “Mother Nature.” These “mothers” are supposed to have the responsibility to take care of their children without expecting anything in return. This concept aligned with the patriarchal cultures' oppression of women and nature. Therefore, ecofeminism itself broadens those concepts, as mentioned earlier. Environmental balance for the earth and humanity can only be attained by addressing the uneven and oppressive treatment of both (Kroneiss 2020). For the last two decades, it has been a great deal to the ecofeminist activists and their struggle to make a theoretical concept between women's oppression and the domination of nature. Its existence provides a more understanding perspective of the male-dominated society. Even during its struggle, ecofeminism has been stereotyped in some ways as weak and problematic. The concept of ecological feminism by Plumwood is quite related and could be solid

and powerful based on feminist theory. Those concepts were applied to one of Roald Dahl's novels, *The Magic Finger* (1966).

This novel was chosen because children's literature plays a significant role in creating children's values (Hunt 2006). The strong emotional connection between human and nonhuman nature that is usually apparent in children's literature is hoped to assert the importance of local and global environmental issues in younger readers. Not to mention that if it is neglected, it will lead to worldwide environmental destruction. This strategy to input such environmental awareness in children's literature addresses children's emotions, makes a lasting impact and changes their perception or behavior towards nature (Gaard 2008). As nature is interconnected with humans, it should not be seen as a commodity that is available to be exploited.

The year 2022 marks 106 years since the British writer Roald Dahl was born and 32 years since he died. However, until now, his books have continued to sell every five seconds, with more than 200 million book sales worldwide, and are available in 63 languages (Nunis 2016). Roald Dahl is proven to be a top-rated children's literature best-selling author. His most notable work is *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which won the New England Round Table of Children's Librarians Award in 1972. The following year, he won the Surrey School award, and in 2000, he won both Millennium Children's Book Award and Blue Peter Book Award. Not only that, but he is also known as the author of *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, *The Witches*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *The BFG*, and *Danny and the Champion of the World*. Those novels play a significant role in almost every part

of a child's formation as a reader (Lee 2010). In 1954, 1959, and 1980, he won 3 Edgar Allan Poe awards and Mystery Writers of America awards. In 2000 he became at the top of Britain's favorite authors list. At most, Dahl was ranked 16th on The Times' list of "The 50 Greatest British Writers Since 1945" in 2008. Since then, he has been referred to as "one of the greatest storytellers for children of the 20th century" (Howard 1996).

Roald Dahl began his work on *The Almost Ducks*, as *The Magic Finger* was initially titled in 1962. *The Magic Finger* is a British children's novel by Roald Dahl and illustrated by Quentin Blake published in 1966. The novel became a TV special in 1990 (Nunis 2016). The story tells about the turning point of the hunter being the hunted one. The Girl, an eight-year-old girl, narrated the story of her neighbors, the Gregg family, who like to hunt. She was naturally a good person, and could not stand animals being hunted for fun. She attempted to convince the Greggs family that their behavior was wrong, but they ignored her since she was young. Despite her age, she was far more responsible than adults. She understood that hunting for fun was wrong. She tried to talk them out of it, but they would not listen. Her rage is fueled by her feelings of unfairness and injustice. She gained a special magical power on her finger as a result of her rage. She taught the Gregg family a lesson by turning them into human-feathered-wings-like-ducks (Dahl 1966). Her actions resembled the gendered behavior that affirmed women's superior awareness of ecological sustainability. Meanwhile, the Greggs, who were mostly male, represented a typical conservative family. They hold traditional gender terms and engage in regressive activities for leisure.

The Magic Finger acted as a didactic story to encourage children to have responsibility and empathy by positioning readers as eco-friendly citizens (Mallan and Bradford 2011, 109). Dahl's use of language has always portrayed human-centered and ecocentric worldviews. Thus, he created an entertaining story to teach respect for all beings and a sense of belonging to nature (Pholmoo 2018). His works throughout the centuries have remained classics among generations of young readers. Although *The Magic Finger* is quite underrated and less well-known than his other remarkable works, its storyline is interesting. His novel also told a moral value that there would be a reaction for every action, and for every behavior, there would be a consequence. While also concerning the powerful impact children's literature has, it is fundamental for the area of English literature to analyze this issue in the novel. The story is about the struggle for a "feminine voice" to be heard and how it was inextricably linked with the struggle for a nurturing, protective attitude towards ecological balance. The main character, The Girl, and her association with nature made it necessary to emphasize the concepts of ecofeminism represented throughout the story. Dahl created a strong, powerful female protagonist who challenged prevailing beliefs about the interactions between humans and nature. This story was fiction, but it offered the reader a glimpse of the interactions between humans and nature. The powerful potential impact of such viewpoints showed what it might be like if we chose to cooperate with nature rather than destroy it. These arguments lead us to categorize these books as an ecofeminist.

Regarding the issue of ecology, there are some previous studies as follows; David Rees' work entitled *Dahl's Chickens: Roald Dahl* (1988), Sirirat Pholmoo's

thesis under the title *Feathered-Wings in A Cambodian Folktale and Roald Dahl's The Magic Finger: The Narratives of The Ecocentric Soul* (2018), and Albuja Aguilar and María Augusta work's entitled *Re-reading Roald Dahl from an Ecological Perspective* (2022). They highlighted that nature and animals are one of the major themes of Dahl's works (Rees 1988). They also stated that Dahl's fantasy works for children are not merely entertainment (Pholmoo 2018). It is quite clear that the ways he depicted morality in that book could encourage the ecological awareness of its reader (Albuja Aguilar 2022).

Another comparable study that highlighted ecofeminism is *The Silenced Voices in The Stories Of 'Bulbbul', 'Philomela' And 'Ahalya': An Ecofeminist Study*, written by Gazala Khan in 2020. She stated that the patriarchal society concept such as "otherness" is deeply engraved in society. This concept is correlated with the act of silencing women's voices (Khan 2020). Therefore, based on the related studies above, this study only focuses on the main character represented in the novel as the narrator of the story, The Girl. The association between women and nature has always been discussed for a long time. Throughout the history of ecofeminism, women are consistently correlated with nature and men with culture, which is still relevant now. From the chosen text, The Girl's speeches and behaviors revealed prejudices that women possess and how she was depicted as "Mother Nature." This study also elaborates on the issue drawn from the novel about how she started from a disempowered position and her progression to an empowered one.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

Considering the background of the issue, this study presents the following research question on *The Girl* as the primary emphasis of this study:

1. How does *The Magic Finger* (1966) portray the role and connections of *The Girl* with nature?
2. How does *The Girl* progress from a disempowered position to an empowered one when she wisely decides to use her magic finger?

1.3 Objective of the Study

This study attempts to answer the following statement of the problems stated above:

1. To view *The Girl*'s role and her connections with nature in Roald Dahl's *The Magic Finger* (1966).
2. To reveal how *The Girl* progresses from a disempowered position to an empowered one when she wisely decides to use her magic finger.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study emphasizes the practical application of gender roles and their dualism regarding women/men and nature/culture. The connection between women and nature and how they are somehow interconnected in children's literature through the lens of ecofeminism in this novel was examined. This will evaluate whether or not their association or its complete absence underlies or undermines an ecofeminist ideology. Their potential liberation from their subordinate positions within the patriarchal social structure was analyzed. It is also important to explain

the ecofeminist concepts included within and recognize the powerful potential given by such a point of view. The portrayal of The Girl as a young, evocative, magically powerful brought a new perspective on how it symbolizes women's empowerment in children's literature with its pedagogical aspects.

This study also aims to be beneficial for both the author and the readers to encourage ecological sustainability awareness through the depiction of subtle ecological issues in Roald Dahl's *The Magic Finger* (1966). It also hopes to contribute to the discussion regarding ecofeminism through the English Language and Literature Department of Universitas Airlangga. In addition, this study seeks to motivate other researchers to do future similar studies or contribute as a reference regarding ecofeminism and the association between women and nature in children's literature.

1.5 Definition of Keyterms

Alternative empowerment:	The simple reversal model affirms women as 'nurturing' and celebrates their power in a way that confirms their connection with nature. It is a standpoint where neither a complete acceptance nor rejection of gender stereotypes leads to cultural remaking alternatives in terms of men/women dualism (Plumwood 1993).
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- Ecofeminism: Ecofeminism is the depicted gender relation between women and nature. It emphasizes the stereotypes embodied based on gender, ethnicity, and class that are linked to ideologies regarding the exploitation and deterioration of the environment (Plumwood 1993).
- Dualism: Dualism is the core of hierarchal systems in a patriarchal culture. However, dualism in this context refers to the relationship between women/nature and men/culture as seen through the lens of ecofeminism (Gaard 1993).
- Mother Nature: The concept of Mother Nature was originally intended to care for nature and it hopefully will care for us in return just like a mother. Unfortunately, the interpretation of it was pretty much distorted from its origin nowadays (Roach 2003).
- The Girl: The Girl is the main female character in *The Magic Finger* (1966) who narrated the story. She is a young girl who has a magic finger

that punish those who exploit nature (Dahl
1966).