

**WOMEN, NATURE, FANTASY:
DUAL REPRESENTATION IN
*THE GIRL WHO DRANK THE MOON***

By

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Abstract

*This article examines the dual representation of the woman-nature connection represented by the author through elements of fantasy and the secondary world in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method and the lens of ecofeminism and fantasy theory to analyze data relevant to the woman-nature connection in the novel. The results show that the author uses three female characters to represent the connection between women and nature, namely Xan (witch), Luna (moon baby), and Madwoman (Adora). The connection between women and nature is depicted through two different sides. On the one hand, women and nature are depicted as loving, caring, and connected entities; but on the other hand, women and nature are depicted as dangerous entities. The use of fantasy elements such as supernatural creatures, magic, and the creation of a secondary world in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* plays an important role in providing a new perspective as well as an alternative escape for readers to transcend the boundaries of various injustices against women and nature that have been normalized in the real world.*

Keywords: *Ecofeminism, the woman-nature connection, fantasy*

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Abstrak

Artikel ini meneliti tentang dual representasi hubungan wanita dan alam yang direpresentasikan penulis melalui elemen fantasi dan dunia skunder dalam *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dan lensa teori ekofeminisme serta fantasi untuk menganalisis data yang relevan dengan hubungan wanita dan alam dalam novel tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penulis menggunakan tiga karakter perempuan untuk merepresentasikan hubungan wanita dan alam, yaitu Xan (penyihir), Luna (bayi bulan), dan Madwoman (Adora). Hubungan perempuan dan alam digambarkan melalui dua sisi yang berbeda. Di satu sisi wanita dan alam digambarkan sebagai entitas yang penuh kasih sayang, kepedulian, dan keterhubungan; namun di sisi lain perempuan dan alam digambarkan sebagai entitas yang berbahaya. Penggunaan elemen-elemen fantasi seperti makhluk supranatural, sihir, dan penciptaan dunia sekunder di dalam *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* mempunyai peran yang penting dalam memberikan pandangan baru sekaligus menjadi alternatif pelarian bagi pembaca untuk bisa melampaui batasan-batasan atas berbagai ketidakadilan terhadap perempuan dan alam yang telah dinormalisasikan di dunia nyata.

Kata kunci: Ekofeminisme, hubungan perempuan-alam, fantasi

A. INTRODUCTION

Women and nature have been associated with each other for a long time, and the two are inseparable. In the domestic and public spheres, women's roles always intersect with nature (Purike et al. 2023, 44). Both nature and women play a role as producing entities. Nature provides resources that can be used by humans, while women are the bearers of sustainable life. Women's innate abilities, such as nurturing, healing, and protecting, make their role similar to that of trees that nurture their habitat (Ravindran 2023, 86). However, what is often found in society, the view that links nature and women often leads to the practice of double domination of both.

Women are the most vulnerable parties to becoming victims of natural resource conflicts (Wardah 2022). The Society of Indonesian Environmental Journalists (SIEJ) interviewed Safina Maulida; she said that when the environment is oppressed, then women are also oppressed

in it (Armein 2021). Environmental conflicts such as mining, extractive industries, and forest clearing damage forests and the lives of surrounding communities. However, the most disadvantaged parties in these cases are women. The existence of social constructions that indirectly regulate the roles of men and women in society often makes women carry excessive duties (Purnamasari 2023). The role of women is often related to nature, such as women who are responsible for providing food for their families. The destruction that occurs to the environment will greatly affect women because they take responsibility for the sustainability of the household (Ravindran 2023, 89).

Authors' attention to the issue of women and nature is often found in literary works, one of which is fantasy literature. Fantasy literature is not merely a place of escape, but rather an effective tool for social criticism that challenges common views that are often detrimental to certain parties. Fantasy literature, with its secondary worlds and magical elements, serves as a powerful bridge and medium for authors to explore complex social and environmental issues without having to worry about sensitivity if they were to be written in a real-world setting. The flexibility of narrative in fantasy literature gives authors the freedom to break down social and political systems, and "... to explore alternative relationships with and between women and the natural world" (Waller 2022, 497).

The existence of magical women is inseparable from the secondary world created by authors in fantasy literature. Many authors have used magical women in their works to challenge the patriarchal system and change the status quo, thereby reversing the view of women and nature as powerless in society (Wickham 2018, 2–6). The positive narratives created by authors in fantasy literature are not only entertaining, but also help to shape and instill a better empathetic perspective and attitude of mutual respect in future generations (Orazbek et al. 2025, 499).

Almost all of the forms of domination and exploitation that occur in nature also harm women. The domination of nature and women is caused by a lack of understanding of how important it is to respect and protect them for a sustainable and balanced life. Understanding the

importance of a fair and balanced life must be taught from an early age because children play an important role in how nature and women will be treated in the future.

Fantasy fiction literature is one of the media that can provide this understanding to children. Fantasy fiction literature plays an important role for children in developing their imagination, creativity, awareness, and understanding of the world which is difficult for them to understand in the real world (Syahrulloh 2012, 13–15). The supernatural elements and imaginary worlds in fantasy fiction literature can easily attract children's attention, and the messages conveyed in them are easier for children to understand.

The Girl Who Drank the Moon is an example of fantasy fiction literature by Barnhill (2016) that has won the 2017 Newbery Medal for the best children's fiction. Barnhill presents an interesting and complex storyline about nature and women that is displayed through various supernatural elements and a secondary world in the narrative. As a fantasy fiction novel, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* presents a story and perspective that transcends the boundaries of the real world in depicting the connection between women and nature. It tells the story of a witch who rescues babies who have been discarded in the middle of the forest by the people of the Protectorate for generations. The novel also tells the story of a baby who accidentally drinks moonlight and has a close connection with some supernatural creatures. The use of women as the active main characters and the depiction of the close connection between nature and women make the researchers interested in using this novel as a research object.

Several previous studies have paid attention to the connection between women and nature, as well as the forms of domination over both presented in literary works. Bashir, Ahmad, and Khan (2025, 214-218) found that male characters in *Provide, Provide* dominate and exploit nature and women by applying capitalism and patriarchy systems. Nature and women's bodies are treated as commodities that serve to satisfy the desires of men in power in gaining money and power. Land is being traded at a cheap price without thinking about the sustainability of the ecosystem that exists on it or the long-term impacts that will arise

because of it. Women sacrifice themselves to provide sexual gratification to someone who will give their husbands a job to make a living. Neither nature nor women has the power to resist and be liberated from the system that oppresses them.

Ravindran (2023, 87-88) found that in *The Adivasi Will not Dance: Stories*, nature becomes destroyed due to exploitation for several purposes such as development, mining, and economy; then women become vulnerable because of it. Many women's roles depend on nature, including getting clean water and food. So when nature is devastated, many women are desperate and powerless, leading to rape and even selling themselves for food and money. Women and nature "... are taken as a resource to satisfy the Man. They are utilized and raped in their own ways" (Ravindran 2023, 88).

Muhammad (2016, 8-16) also found that the female characters in *A Thousand Acres* suffered from the domination and exploitation of the male characters. Ginny and Rose suffer from diseases caused by soil and water pollution because their father uses excessive fertilizers and chemicals that damage the environment. The female characters in *A Thousand Acres* are only in the background, and often experience violence and domination from male characters.

Meanwhile, some research on *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* is still limited to only a few aspects. Shintia and Fanani (2021, 71) focused on analyzing Luna's character using the theory of magic and found that the fantasy elements in the novel show Luna's life and magic to be more powerful than Xan's. Kennedy (2018, 61) with ecocritical approach focused on the changes presented in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* through the characters' connection with place, memory, and cultural narratives. While Shintia (2020, 34) focused on the themes in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, and found that some of the themes present in the novel are family, love, hope, and magic.

Based on previous studies, it can be seen that nature and women have a strong relationship and are often portrayed as victims of the system that dominates them. The researchers have yet to find a study that analyzes *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* using a combined lens of ecofeminism and fantasy theory. This research fills the existing gap by

using this work as the object of the research, where the elements of fantasy, and the secondary world in it allow the representation of the connection between women and nature outside the conventional narrative that is often encountered.

This research aims to examine how the connection between several female characters and nature is dually represented through magical elements and the secondary world in the novel. The female characters that will be the focus of analysis are Xan, Luna, and Madwoman. The researchers use Plumwood's ecofeminism theory by focusing on the concept of the woman-nature connection. Tolkien's fantasy theory is also used by the researchers to assist in understanding and analyzing the fantasy elements used in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*.

Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that not only pays deep attention to women but also pays attention to ecology. Ecofeminism emerged around the 1970s and was pioneered by Françoise d'Eaubonne. According to Castle (2013, 304), ecofeminism is a theory based on criticism of the dualism of women and nature which then becomes the root of the domination that occurs to nature and women as stated by Warren. The dual domination of nature and women, as well as the patriarchal society, are the main causes of ecological destruction (Dar and Syed 2019, 58). Françoise d'Eaubonne, argues that ecofeminism aims to liberate women and nature from all forms of domination and exploitation (Vakoch 2023, xxv). Over time, a lot of theorists have contributed their thoughts and enriched perspectives in the theory of ecofeminism. One of the many theorists in ecofeminism is Val Plumwood.

Val Plumwood is an Australian environmental philosopher. In her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood presents her critical thoughts on ecofeminism. According to Plumwood (1993, 10), ecofeminism is a response to a series of problems that arise in two major social currents, namely feminism and ecology. Plumwood (inNowak 2022, 13) says that ecofeminism shows how the West's broken relationship and mistreatment of nature is one of the reasons humans fail to understand the urgency of the current ecological crisis.

In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood (1993, 20) discusses several concepts of ecofeminism, one of which is the woman-nature connection. Since ancient times, men have always been associated with culture, while women are associated with nature. The woman-nature connection is a concept that looks at the relationship that women and nature have historically, culturally, and symbolically. The feminine connection between women and nature makes women considered as the mother earth who is always related to connection, care, tenderness, and fertility (Plumwood 1993, 20–21). This view gives the impression of a deep and harmonious relationship between women and nature, but it also harms both. The traditional view that always associates women with nature causes women to always be seen “... as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life” (Plumwood 1993, 20). This view reinforces masculinity and makes women and nature weak figures.

We cannot ignore the elements of fantasy in fantasy fiction literature. Therefore, the researchers also use fantasy fiction theory to analyze *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*. In literary works, fantasy is an imaginative fiction constructed through otherworldly and supernatural characters through narration (Syahrulloh 2012, 5). Colin Manlove (1999, 3) in (Hirst 2018, 16) says that fantasy literature is “a fiction involving the supernatural or impossible.” Supernatural elements in fantasy fiction literature provide an alternative escape from the normalized oppression of the real world, see history from a different perspective, explore the norms of life, and imagine another world with a better and fairer order (Kroneiss 2020, 61; Waller 2022, 491).

In addition to supernatural elements, the secondary world plays a vital role in fantasy fiction literature. Through the secondary world, the authors present another world with rules, views, and systems that are completely different and beyond the boundaries of the real world. Simply put, fantasy fiction literature allows authors to create a secondary world that criticizes, challenges, and even develops phenomena that fight against normalized injustice in the real world.

J.R.R. Tolkien is a famous fantasy writer, and *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are his most famous works. Tolkien identifies several

functions that fantasy works offer the readers, including recovery, escape, and consolation. Recovery is one of the functions of fantasy that refers to the ability to recover the reader's perspective on things that are familiar in the real world. "We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity" (Tolkien 2008, 67). Escape is a key function in fantasy works that gives the reader the ability to escape to a new world as an alternative to the pressures of life (Tolkien 2008, 67). Meanwhile, consolation is "the joy of the happy ending, or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn' (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale)" (Tolkien 2008, 75). The researchers use these three concepts to explore the dual representation of the connection between nature and women through magical elements and the secondary world in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*.

This research is classified as a literary criticism; a term for studies concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating literary works (Abrams 1999, 49–50). The method used is descriptive qualitative. Data collection was done through in-depth reading of the novel *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*. The data was then classified based on its relevance to the representation of the woman-nature connection. After classifying, the data was analyzed using Plumwood's ecofeminism and Tolkien's fantasy theory. Subsequently, the results of the analysis were interpreted to find the dual representation of the connection between women and nature in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*.

B. THE WOMEN-NATURE CONNECTION IN *THE GIRL WHO DRANK THE MOON*

The Girl Who Drank the Moon is a fantasy fiction novel that appeals to children and has a profound message for readers of all ages. The author's combination of themes of women and nature with fantasy elements makes this novel very interesting to read and learn from. The woman-nature connection is a concept that looks at the relationship that women and nature have historically, culturally, and symbolically (Plumwood 1993, 20). Because the object of this research is a literary work with a fantasy genre; an imaginative fiction constructed through otherworldly

and supernatural characters through narration (Syahrulloh 2012, 5), the researchers also use Tolkien's concept of fantasy.

The researchers found some female characters that the author uses to represent the woman-nature connection, as well as the recovery and escape from the real world.

1. The Connection between Xan and the Nature

Xan is a kind witch, around 500 years old. Every year, the elders of the Protectorate leave a baby in the middle of the forest due to the myth of an evil witch who asks for the youngest baby annually; Xan also goes to the forest every year to save the baby.

Witch is one of the supernatural creatures that are often portrayed as a woman with magical powers who uses them for bad things, especially in American and European folklore (Haesler 2021, 2). Women are socially considered unimportant entities, so anything related to bad things will be associated with femininity (Rahayu 2010, 45). The novel also tells that the Protectorate's residents' stereotype of witches is that they are evil and dangerous. Some things can obscure reality through sustained negative stereotypes (Rahayu 2015, 15), like the Protectorate's residents' generations-long negative stereotyping of Xan as an evil witch when she is not.

... Xan did what any sensible witch would do: once it was dark enough to see the stars, she reached up one hand and gathered starlight in her fingers, like the silken threads of spiders' webs, and fed it to the child. (Barnhill 2016, 19).

Witches are symbols of revolution, power, and the connection between women and nature (Xia 2019, 1), just as Xan has a connection with nature. In the secondary world, the author depicts Xan taking starlight with her bare hands and giving it to the baby, something that never could happen in the real world. In terms of ecofeminism, nature provides and gives what Xan needs to fulfill the baby's needs; based on the concept of the woman-nature connection, both Xan and nature have a role as providers of the baby's needs.

In *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, the witch (Xan) acts as a nurse for other living things; the babies who were thrown into the forest. Meanwhile, nature acts as an entity that provides the things Xan needs to

take care of the baby who was thrown into the forest. The quotations above are in line with Plumwood (1993, 20–21) who said that women's feminine relationship with nature gives rise to the view of women as mothers of the earth, often associated with care, fertility, connectedness, and tenderness.

She could fill them up, of course, with both starlight and moonlight, and any other magic that she could find lying around, but something told her it would only be a temporary solution (Barnhill 2016, 53).

Xan is able to do things that other humans can't do because she has magic. Magic is supernatural elements that cannot be separated from fantasy fiction, and it allows those who possess it to do and create impossible things and situations (Höfel 2010, 80). Xan's connection with the moon, which is part of nature, is so close because the moon gives her the ability to survive for centuries, as well as having magical abilities that she uses to help abandoned babies. This aligns with Western views that often associate the moon with the symbol of life (Shi and Zhong 2021, 380). Through the secondary world and various supernatural elements, the author provides readers with an escape by presenting a situation of the harmonious and balanced relationship humans (represented through the female character, Xan) have with nature. Nature provides what humans need, and humans utilize natural resources wisely, which is rarely found and done by humans today.

2. The Connection between Luna and Nature

Luna was just an ordinary baby who was a victim of infant sacrifice by the people of the Protectorate until Xan saved her and accidentally gave her a drink of moonlight. Because the accident made Luna a baby full of magic, and it would significantly impact Luna, the environment, and the people around her in the future, Xan decided to adopt Luna as her granddaughter. Being the granddaughter of a witch makes Luna interact more and have a close connection with other supernatural creatures, namely Fyrian and Glerk, rather than ordinary humans.

And there was something else, too. This surging feeling in her bones. This clicking inside her head. This feeling as though she had an invisible gear inside her, pushing her, inch by inch, toward . . . something. Her whole life, she never knew what. Magic, her bones said (Barnhill 2016, 242).

Fyrian was growing. Glerk didn't believe it at first, but with each step they took, Fyrian grew a little bit more. Not evenly. His nose enlarged like a tremendous melon at the tip of his snout. Then one eye expanded to twice the size of the other. Then his wings. Then his feet. Then one foot. Bit after bit grew, then slowed, then grew, and then slowed (Barnhill 2016, 242).

The first quotation shows Luna's internal transformation. To protect Luna, the environment, and those around her from the immense power Luna cannot yet control, Xan locks Luna's magic into a small grain implanted in Luna's head. When she was 13 years old, Luna began to feel that there was something so big in her that exceeded herself, which she had never known before, and now it continues to push her forward to reveal things she has never known. Luna, who had never known the potential within her, had to find out and adapt to this new thing. This point is the beginning of Luna discovering her true self as a witch.

The second quotation refers to Fyrian, a dove-sized dragon who has lived with Xan for over a hundred years. Western society views dragons as symbols of cruel monsters and enemies of humans; dragons are also considered as the snakes's of satan avatar in the bible (Yuan 2015, 41). In Western mythology, women are always depicted as victims of dragons, which can be interpreted as a symbol of male aggression (Schubart 2016, 120); in the narrative, the author describes Fyrian as a male dragon who accompanies women (Luna). This point shows how the author uses the secondary world to escape from the social order in which men always dominate women. The author also recovers the reader's view of dragons as kind, loving, and even closely related to humans (Luna), contrary to the views and myths that have existed in the West. Through fantasy world, the author is able to voice and create a new view for readers about some things.

The dragon is often used as an archetypal symbol of transformation and the revelation of great power in the soul of an individual (Stevens 1994, 6), in line with the data above that relates the dragon to the transformation and revelation of power experienced by the main female character (Luna). The gradual and uneven external transformation that occurs to Fyrian reflects the internal transformation that happens to Luna in discovering her true self, who has not fully mastered the magical potential within her. Viewed from the context of ecofeminism, the transformation that occurs simultaneously between Fyrian and Luna shows a strong connection between women and nature, where changes that occur in women also affect changes in nature. “.. the mysterious natures of women’s magic and dragon magic are somehow connected” (Theoret 2020, 28), reflects the symbolic relationship of femininity and the power of nature that illustrates the connection.

Glerk made a sling for Luna that hung from all four of his shoulders as he walked on all sixes (Barnhill 2016, 31).

When he wasn’t cradling Luna. Or singing to Luna. Or whispering poetry into her ear as she slept (Barnhill 2016, 33).

Glerk is a kind swamp monster who has lived with Xan and Fyrian for a long time. A monster is an imaginary, mystical, abnormal creature with multiple limbs (such as more than one head), huge, and is usually evil and frightening (Murgatroyd 2007, 1). Glerk took part in Luna’s upbringing as a child. The author narrates that Glerk was reluctant to accept Luna at first, but over time he came to love her. Glerk was willing to make a sling and use several parts of his body as a hanger to carry Luna while he walked. He tried to provide comfort to the baby. Glerk also had a habit of singing and reciting poetry to Luna until she fell asleep. The portrayal of Glerk as a kind and loving monster is apt, as the presence of monsters serves as entertaining, didactic, and a sign that something different should not always be considered a threat (Varrik 2018, 55). Glerk’s role as Luna’s nurturer represents how nature has a role in nurturing (Merchant 1989, 2–3) to support human life. The affection, parenting, and care given by Glerk and Fyrian to Luna

illustrate the symbolism of a harmonious connection between nature and women (Plumwood 1993, 20–21).

3. The Connection between Madwoman and Nature

In the fantasy fiction literature, the society, nature, space, and situations are different from those in the 'normal' world (Höfel 2010, 29). The annual baby sacrifice is a condition agreed upon and accepted by the people in the village in the secondary world created by the author. Madwoman, whose real name is Adora, is Luna's biological mother. Every mother in the Protectorate has the possibility of losing their child every year, but for generations, no one has dared to defend their child. Adora was the only mother who dared to protect her child and go against the Protectorate's rules.

A man with a scratched up face and a swollen lower lip and bloody bald spots across his skull where his hair had been torn out in clumps met them at the door (Barnhill 2016, 9).

From the rafters above them, a woman screeched and howled as the Elders entered the house. She hissed and spat like a cornered animal. "GET OUT!" she screamed. "You cannot have her. I spit on your faces and curse your names. Leave my home at once, or I shall tear out your eyes and throw them to the crows!" (Barnhill 2016, 10).

The statements above show that a woman (madwoman) is portrayed by the author as a woman who is so wild that she can hurt anyone, including her own family. The actions taken by the madwoman were solely to protect her baby. Nevertheless, because of her wild and uncivilized animal-like behavior, people view her as a crazy woman who needs to be tamed.

The author's depiction of the madwoman in the secondary world shows the ability of fantasy to recover the reader's view and become an escape from the real world. The madwoman as a rebellious woman is a form of escape from the social norms that always oppress women and see them as passive in the real world; through the secondary world, the author portrays that women do not hesitate to voice and fight against the system that harms them, unlike the real world where women do not have the opportunity or courage to do so. Adora's violent behavior is also a

form of recovering views for readers about the true power of women; they are not passive, they can fight back and can even become a nightmare for anyone who oppresses them when they have risen. Through the secondary world, the author uses a madwoman to oppose the traditions that dominate and harm women. This represents ecofeminism's goal of freeing nature and women from exploitation (Vakoch 2023, xxv).

But everyone knew someone who had accidentally wandered too far. And fell into a sinkhole. Or stepped in a mud pot, boiling off most of their skin. Or wandered into a swale where the air was bad, and never returned. The forest was dangerous (Barnhill 2016, 12).

The statement above implies that the forest is a dangerous part of nature. Some people have tried to access the forest and ended up dying due to various things in the forest. The forest is a wild area that has numerous threats to people who don't know it well. The author provides a new image of nature as dangerous, and no one wants to risk approaching it. This contrasts with the real world, where nature is considered passive and easy to dominate and exploit.

The data above show how women (madwoman) and nature (forest) are also viewed as dangerous entities. The author challenges the stereotype of women and nature as passive entities by depicting nature and women beyond the stereotype itself. According to Merchant (1989, 127), there are two images of nature and women; one of which is nature, and women were associated as witches who caused damage, killed babies, and hindered generation. Plumwood (1993, 9) also states that women in certain situations can do violence. just like the madwoman and forest in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, who are portrayed as entities that are dangerous to many people.

C. CONCLUSION

The results of the discussion show that the author represents the connection between women and nature in *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* through the secondary world from two different sides. Three female characters, namely, Xan (the witch), Luna (the moon baby), and Adora (the madwoman), are used by the author to represent the connection between women and nature. Through Xan and Luna, the author represents that women and nature have a strong feminine connection, shown through the caring and life-giving actions of both women and nature. On the other hand, through Adora, the author portrays nature and women as active and dangerous entities.

Fantasy elements and the secondary world play an essential role in the narrative, presenting stories and views that go beyond the boundaries of the real world about the close connection between women and nature. Xan and Luna recover the reader's view about the potential of the harmonies and the close connection between humans and nature, as well as men and women, which is often ignored in the real world. Meanwhile, through Adora (the madwoman), women and nature are represented as an escape and a recovery that challenges the stereotype that women and nature are passive entities.

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