



Environmental Ethics Manifested in Stories by Roald Dahl-A Study on Environmental Writing for Children

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Abstract. At a time when ecological issues such as environmental degradation and species extinction are becoming increasingly prominent, environmental education to children through literature has been a dire topic to discuss. This essay focuses on Roald Dahl, who is considered one of the most beloved storytellers of the twentieth century, to explore the environmental ethics manifested in his literary works to contribute to the present scholarship in Ecocriticism and children's literature. By analyzing five books by Roald Dahl, the author finds that Roald Dahl, a world-class children's literature writer, has been informing the following green ethics to his readers: humans should have a harmonious relationship with the physical environment, namely nature.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Roald Dahl, Ecocriticism, Environmental Writing

1 Introduction

Roald Dahl is an outstanding British novelist. His works have been widely circulated among children and adults, and his books have sold more than 250 million copies worldwide. Dahl was born in Norway and educated in England. In World War II, he became a fighter pilot. The richness and diversity of his whole life have brought lots of literary materials for his works.

During the later World War II, Roald Dahl wrote a war memoir, which is the start of his writing stage. His horrible adult stories are full of black humor and unexpected endings. In the meantime, his children's fiction is always told from the point of view of a child, and they typically involve adult villains who hate and mistreat children and feature at least one "good" adult to counteract the villains. And his books see the triumph of the child.

This paper endeavors to apply ecocriticism to the works of Roald Dahl to explore the environmental ethics manifested in his literary works, contributing to the present scholarship in Ecocriticism and children's literature. This paper consists of four parts: the first one demonstrates the theoretical basis; the second part illustrates the relationships between mankind and elements from the wilderness in the works of Dahl; the third part discusses how Dahl's ethical ideas are reflected in his four works aspects of

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ethics; and the last part is the conclusion. This paper aims to find the environmental ethics that Roland Dahl wants to deliver to young readers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Ecocriticism and Environmental Writing in Children's literature

'Ecocriticism, to put it simply, is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (Cheryll Glotfelty).¹ It is also sometimes called 'green studies.' Both 'ecocriticism' and 'green studies' are used to refer to a critical approach that began in the USA in the late 1980s, and in the UK in the early 1990s. In the USA, it was founded by Cheryll Glotfelty, who co-edited with Harold Fromm to publish a collection of helpful and definitive essays entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (University of Georgia Press, 1996). Ecocriticism as a literary approach was first put forward in the 1970s. In the USA, ecocriticism has its source from the three major nineteenth-century American Writers: Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), Margaret Fuller (1810-50), and Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) who are also known as transcendentalists. While in the UK, Ecocriticism, or green studies, is largely influenced by the British Romanticism of the 1790s. The structure of Ecocriticism in the UK is less developed than in the USA. Generally, the term 'ecocriticism' was frequently used in the USA, whereas 'green' studies were more often used in the UK. In the last fifteen years, the practice and theory of American and British Ecocriticism have been converging. Ecocritics usually approach literary works from the following perspectives, according to Peter Barry:

- "They read literary works from an ecocentric perspective, with particular attention to the representation of nature.
- They extend the applicability of a range of ecocentric concepts, such as growth and energy, balance and imbalance, symbiosis, and mutuality, and sustainable or unsustainable uses of energy and resources.
- They extend the range of literary-critical practice by placing a new emphasis on 'factual' writing, especially reflective topographical material such as essays, travel writing, etc.
- They give particular canonical emphasis to writers who foreground nature as a major part of their subject matter, such as the American transcendentalists and the British Romantics.
- They turn away from the 'social constructivism' and 'linguistic determinism' of dominant literary theories and instead emphasize ecocentric values of meticulous observation and collective ethical responsibility. (270)²

While ecology is concerned with the sufferings of millions of people on the planet today whose lives are comprised or indeed wasted by environmental destruction and mismanagement, it is also necessarily future-oriented. According to Bennett & Royle, "Ecocriticism demands a rethinking of ethics, extending the notion of our responsibility for others unpredictably into the future since those others include people yet to be born,

as well as those, who will live after death.” In this sense, literature for teenagers and children seems to carry the burden of cultivating a sense of environmental protection for future generations. (165)³

Stories for children that are usually encountered with the physical environment have long existed before the invention of childhood itself as a distinct life stage in the post-Enlightenment West. According to Lawrence Buell, the field of environmental writing for children is so vast that no one can pretend to know more than a fraction of it (408).¹ There have been scholars working on it, but the archive as a whole is still largely terra incognita.

2.1.1 Two Bodies of Environmental Writing in Children’s literature.

Overall, the reconnaissance of environmental writing for children falls into two parts. The first is the so-called golden age of children’s literature in the late Victorian era, while the second is the works in the past half-century or so. At present, the environmental writing for children archive, according to Lawrence Buell, can be classified into two bodies: “The first body of writing is purported to imagine nonhuman life-worlds from the standpoint of the creatures themselves, generally not as a realm of absolute difference but as a parallel universe reflecting upon the human, often featuring interaction with human actors.” (409)¹ This kind of writing heavily depends on the ancient talking animal convention and other stratagems that semi-anthropomorphize its fictive nonhumans but in the process also at least implicitly chides human insouciance and cruelty toward other creatures, lodging thereby a moral extensionist claim that humans should take the interests and welfare of other creatures more greatly into account, sometimes to the point of envisioning human (children) themselves as fellow animals. Popular examples are Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877); Beatrix Potter’s *Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902); Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows* (1908); Felix Salten’s *Bambi* (1923) and the Disney films thereof; E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* (1952); and Richard Adams’s *Watership Down* (1972). While the second body of “writing constellates around the discovery or construction of special, often hidden outdoor places by children that are shown to have catalytic significance in bonding them to the natural environment and beyond that, by implication at least, in identity-formation over the long run, such that natural environment comes to feel a catalytic agent and crucial ingredient of personal being.” (408)¹ Early examples include Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Two Little Savages* (1903), *The Secret Garden*, and others.

2.2 Roald Dahl and Environmental Writing

2.2.1 Introduction of Roald Dahl.

Since the archive of environmental writing for children is still large and requires more studies, the aim and major contribution of this essay is to explore environmental writing for children from a major writer of children’s literature in the 20th century, i.e., Roald Dahl.

Roald Dahl is an outstanding British novelist. His works have been widely circulated among children and adults, and his books have sold more than 250 million copies

worldwide. Dahl was born in Norway and educated in England. In World War II, he became a fighter pilot. The richness and diversity of his whole life have brought lots of literary materials for his works.

During the later World War II, Roald Dahl wrote a war memoir, which is the start of his writing state. His horrible adult stories are full of black humor and unexpected endings. In the meantime, his children's fiction is usually told from the point of view of a child, and they typically involve adult villains who hate and mistreat children and feature at least one "good" adult to counteract the villains. Most of the present studies on Dahl are mainly focused on children's education or criticize Dahl's works combining his personal life. Few contributions are made from Ecocriticism's perspective to analyze Dahl's marvelous literary works. Therefore, this essay hopes to discover the environmental, and ethical values of Dahls' work and provide useful resources for future development in environmental writing for children.

In this essay, the author will argue that Roald Dahl manifested various human-wilderness relationships to illustrate his moral ethics on nature to younger readers—Wilderness is depicted as coexisting with the human world rather than peripheral or subordinate to it. It displays a power that cannot be ignored and that humans should have a harmonious relationship with the physical environment. To further elaborate this argument, the author will focus on the human-wilderness relationships manifested in five books written by Dahl: *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *The Twits* (1967), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), *the Enormous Crocodile* (1978) and *Tois Tort* (1990).

According to the present scholarships on environmental writing for children, it is clear, that *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *the Enormous Crocodile*, and *the Twits* can be classified into the first body of environmental writing for children while *James and the Giant Peach* can be categorized into the second one. *Tois Trot* is not a typical type of environmental writing for children.

2.2.2 On Wilderness.

As nature is too broad to discuss within such a short essay, the author thus focuses on the Wilderness of nature to illustrate Dahl's environmental ethics. To define wilderness is rather difficult since it has many various meanings. In this essay, the author takes the group of defining Wilderness from a general perspective, defining wilderness as a tract or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings.⁷⁴

To understand the environmental ethics delivered to its readers, an exploration of the relationships between mankind and elements from Wilderness in the works of Dahl is required. Therefore, in the next part, the author will illustrate this issue in detail.

3 Relationships between Mankind and Elements from Wilderness in Works of Dahl

Generally, various human-wilderness relationships are shown in the books of Dahl. The author chooses the above five books of Dahl to discuss environmental ethics mainly because there exist human-wilderness relationships in the books. Generally, the author believes that there are mostly two kinds of human-wilderness relationships manifested

in the works of Dahl. The first is an antagonistic relationship between humans and the Wilderness. It suggests that human characters are hostile to Wilderness. They invariably compete with each other so as to decide the winner. The second one is a harmonious relationship between humans and the Wilderness. This means that human characters often make peace with the Wilderness and cooperate with each other. Further elaboration is produced below:

3.1 Antagonistic Relationship between Humans and Wilderness

The author argues that there exists an antagonistic human-wilderness relationship in the works of Dahl. To further elaborate on the relationship, the definition of antagonistic is to be decided. In Webster's Dictionary, antagonistic refers to: "Showing dislike or opposition: marked by or resulting from antagonism." Major examples can be found in stories such as *Mr. Fantastic Fox*, *the Twists*, and *The Enormous Crocodile*.

3.1.1 Mr. Fantastic Fox.

In *Mr. Fantastic Fox*, the major human-wilderness relation is shown through the main plot, namely the relationship between Mr. Fantastic Fox and the three farmers. The story generally focuses on a clever fox named Mr. Fox, who lives underground beside a tree with his family. To feed his family, he steals from three rich farmers named Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. Tired of the stealing, the three farmers decide to ambush Mr. Fox and catch him, but they failed. Then, the farmers dig up the burrow where Mr. Fox and his family live by means of spades and later excavators. Mr. Fox and his family successfully escape by digging further deeper. After that, the farmers feel that their persistence in digging seems to be ridiculous but still refuse to give up catching Mr. Fox. They later decide to starve the foxes by surrounding Mr. Fox's hole. After the three-day starve underground, Mr. Fox decides to dig up channels to one of Boggis' four chicken houses. Mr. Fox kills several chickens and asks his son to carry the food home. On the way to their destination, Mr. Fox runs into his friend Badger and asks him to accompany him, as well as to invite other animals to come to join in the feast, including animals such as the Moles, the Rabbit, and the Weasels. With the help of Badger, the animals dig a tunnel to Bunce's storehouse to get more meat. But the Rabbits eat vegetables. Thus, they went to Bean's secret cider cellar. They are nearly caught by the Bean's servant Mabel and have met the Rat. Later, they have a banquet for all the animals living on earth. In the end, Mr. Fox invites all the underground animals to stay with him, for he will prepare food for them. While for the three farmers, according to Dahl, "they are still waiting." Mr. Fox, as a wild species living in the mountain, is a representative of wildness.

Right from the beginning of the story, the antagonist relationship between the three farmers and the foxes is set. To the farmers, Mr. Fox is the "robber." (Dahl 3)⁵ The farmers are "wild with rage" because of the stealing that they decide to catch or kill Mr. Fox. The three farmers hate Mr. Fox extremely:

"I'd like to rip his guts out!" said Bunce.

"He must be killed!" cried Bean." (Dahl 4)⁵

This hatred of the Foxes directly led to the race of digging.

Other human characters also show their hatred to the Foxes. When the wild animals were at the cider cell, the women who almost spotted them expressed her hatred and anger to Mr. Fox, the representative of Wilderness. The woman says that she will be “glad when the rotten brute is killed and strung up on the front porch.” (Dahl 45) The antagonistic relationship reaches its climax when the digging race continues. Most part of the story centers on the digging competition between the three farmers and the Fox family. Generally, the farmers are portrayed as evil humans who hurt animals and apply machines to damage the natural environment, only serving the purpose of their own. In the digging race, the antagonistic relationship between the farmers and the Foxes is further enlarged to all the underground animals. To this extent, Mr. Fantastic Fox has shown an antagonistic relationship between humans and elements of Wilderness by though the digging race.

3.1.2 The Twits.

The competitive antagonistic relationship can also be seen in *The Twits*. *The Twits* recounts a story about Muggle-Wump and his monkey family working with local birds to escape from, and seek revenge on the nasty Mr. and Mrs. Twit who are hideous, vindictive, spiteful, and mistreat animals and even children. The human-animal relationship is mainly shown through the Twits’ attitudes toward animals. On the one hand, they keep a family of monkeys, the Muggle-Wumps, dreaming of creating the first upside-down monkey circus in the world. On the other hand, they also catch birds for bird pie by coating tree limbs with the Hughtight glue. “Once a week, on Wednesday, the Twits had Bird Pie for supper. Mr. Twits caught the birds, and Mrs. Twit cooked them.” (Dahl, 1967)⁶ To the Twits, the birds are just food for them, rather than their friends.

Being the protagonists of the story, the Muggle-Wumps and the Roly-Poly Bird are the representatives of Wilderness. They both come from Africa, the continent of Wilderness. “Like the monkeys, the Roly-Poly Bird came from Africa and spoke the same language as they did. (Dahl 21)⁶ Rather than getting along well with the Twits, they fought against them, which led to the demise of the Twits. All along with the story, the Twits, as the representative of humans, are against the representatives of Wilderness, i.e., the African animals and birds. The Twits train the Muggle-Wump merely to fulfill their personal desires. The antagonist human-wilderness relationship in the story begins with the training of the Muggle-Wump monkeys:

“They had to play football upside down. They had to balance one top of the other upside down, with Muggle-Wump at the bottom and the smallest baby at the very top. They even had to eat and drink upside down.” (Dahl 20)⁶

Twits are seeing Wilderness as a tool for their own goal. “It was his dream that one day he would own the first great upside-down monkey circus in the world. And with the help of the Roly-Poly Bird, the Muggle-Wumps successfully escape from the cage. But instead of just fleeing away, they attempted to punish the Twits. “Calm down, everybody. Before we escape from this beastly place, we have one essential thing to do.” (Dahl 26)⁶ Said the Muggle-Wump. What they do is glue the Twits onto the floor just as the Twits do to catch the birds.

3.1.3 The Enormous Crocodile.

The antagonistic human-wilderness relationship is also shown in the Enormous Crocodile.

The story generally recounts an enormous crocodile's journey to eat children for lunch. It begins in Africa in a large deep, muddy river, in which the protagonist (the enormous crocodile) is talking to a smaller crocodile that he wants to eat children. The smaller one disagrees with him, claiming that children are not as tasty as fish. Then the enormous crocodile leaves the river for the town to eat children. On his way to the town, he announces his intention to a few animals in the jungle, including Humpy Rumpy, the hippopotamus, Trunky the elephant, Muggle-Wump the monkey, and the Roly-Poly Bird. All the animals expressed their disgust for the enormous crocodile and hope he will fail. He attacks Muggle-Wump and the Roly-Bird but fails.

The enormous crocodile has three attempts to eat the children. First of all, he went to the coconut tree forest, where children usually show up and disguise themselves as small coconut tree with branches and coconuts. When he is about to succeed, Humpy Rumpy comes and saves the children, Toto and Mary. Next, the crocodile goes to the playground outside of the school and disguises himself as a see-saw, hoping to eat a whole class of children, but again the trick is ruined by Muggle-Wump. Then, the crocodile heads to a funfair and disguises himself as a wooden crocodile on a merry-go-round by placing himself between a brown lion and a yellow dragon. When he is about to eat a girl named Jill, Roly-Poly comes, and for a third time, the trick is in vain.

Last, of all, the crocodile goes to a picnic place just outside of the town and disguises himself as a long, wooden four-legged bench, hoping to eat four children. This time it is Trunky the elephant who comes and saves them. The crocodile does not manage to sneak out this time and is hosted by the elephant into the air and then is swung round and round faster and faster and eventually is cast off to the sky, out of the earth, and into space. The enormous crocodile whizzes past the Moon, past some stars and past all the other planets, including Mars, before finally crashing headlong into the Sun where he incinerated like a sausage. But this time, the human-animal relationship seems to be a little different. In the story, humans become the protagonist, while the enormous crocodile, as a representative of the Wilderness, becomes the antagonist who persistently wants children. Right from the beginning of the story, the antagonistic human-wilderness relationship is set up. "I'm the bravest croc in the river... I'm the only one who dares to leave the water and go through the jungle to town to look for little children to eat." (Dahl 2)⁷ The enormous crocodile is portrayed as an intruder from the wild who attempts to hurt humans. But all failed because of interferences from other animals.

To conclude, we find that in Dahl's works such as *Mr. Fantastic Fox*, *the Twits*, and *The Enormous Crocodile*, the human-wilderness relationship is shown as antagonistic.

3.2 Harmonious Relationship Between Humans and Wilderness

In the stories created by Dahl, the human-wilderness relationship is also illustrated as peaceful and harmonious. Here, the author refers to the word "harmonious" as denoting the state of being "friendly and peaceful"⁸ (Webster's Dictionary). In the following parts, the author will illustrate examples in detail.

3.2.1 James and the Giant Peach.

In *James and the Giant Peach*, there are several human-wilderness relationships since there is more than one human character. The book generally recounts the adventure of a boy named James Henry Trotter. He lived with his parents in a house by the sea happily. Unluckily, his parents were killed by the rhinoceros when he was four years old. He was forced to live with his aunts, who were extremely evil people. Instead of taking good care of him, they treated him badly, abusing him through language and other forms. After a few years of living with his aunts, he accidentally met a mysterious man who gave him magical beans and claimed that his life would be full of adventures if he drinks them. Unfortunately, his beans spilled onto the floor of the garden on his way home, which produced a peach that grew as big as the size of a house. Later, the aunts of James started to charge people around for visiting the peach. But James was locked in his house instead.

On the assignment of cleaning the trash, James, by accident, discovered a tunnel in the peach and went through it and met magical creatures, who became human-like because of the magical beans, such as Centipede, Miss Spider, Old Green Grasshopper, Earthworm, Ladybug, Glowworm, and Silkworm. The next day, the peach was cut off from the stem and rolled down, causing the death of James' aunts.

The peach kept rolling and ended up falling into the sea, where they were later surrounded by sharks. James was a clever boy, and he used the threads from Miss Spider and Silkworm to lift them and the peach up from the ocean. That's when their journey in the sky began. In the sky, they met "cloudmen" who attacked them through hailstones because Centipede irritated them. Later, James managed to pull the peach down on the lower part of the sky and realized that they had crossed the Atlantic Ocean and arrived at New York City. People down in the city, however, mistakenly considered the peach a bomb and were in great panic, fleeing around for evacuation. Thereafter, officers and firemen made their acquaintances with the peach, James, and the magical creatures, at which point the panic was relieved. In the end, James told his entire adventure and became great friends with many children in New York, and they ate the peach while the magical creatures all found their own employment.

Wilderness in the story is manifested in several ways, including animals such as insects, sharks, and seagulls, natural surroundings such as the ocean, and the "cloudman." For the human-wilderness relationship manifested in the book, an analysis of story-based the main characters is necessary. Since the protagonist of the story is James, the analysis will primarily focus on James as the representative of humans. In the story, the relationship between James and Wilderness is peaceful and friendly, suggesting a harmonious theme. When first met with the insects, James looked "as though he's going to faint any second" (Dahl 33)⁹ because he was terrified that the "creatures" would eat him. In this sense, the animals as the representative of Wilderness seem to have an antagonistic relationship, but later on, James and the insects get well along with each other. "You are one of the crew. We're all in the boat." (Dahl 34)⁹ This sentence denotes that James and the magical insects have the same interests. The peach is metaphorically described as a boat with the human beings-James, animals (insects) being the crew. In this sense, we can see that the main human-animal relationship is portrayed as co-dependent. And while they were in the sea attacked by the sharks, they worked together

to escape from danger. It is also noteworthy that half of the adventure took place in the sky with the seagulls lifting the peach. The seagulls also represent wildness. Therefore, we can see that harmonious human-wilderness relationship do exist in James and the Giant Peach.

3.2.2 Esio Trot.

A harmonious human-wilderness relationship is also shown in *Esio Trot*. This is a romantic short story about how animals help people find their love. There are three main characters. They are Mr. Hoppy, Mrs. Silver, and the tortoise(s). Mr. Hoppy lived alone and was lonely. He had two loves in his life. The first was flowers he grew, and the second was Mrs. Silver, who was a lonely widow and lived downstairs. Being too shy, Mr. Hoppy was not able to express his love for Mrs. Silver. While Mrs. Silver had her own love which was a tortoise named Alfie. One day Mrs. Silver expressed her wish to see the tortoise grow faster to Mr. Hoppy. Mr. Hoppy thought of a plan to fulfill the wish of Mrs. Silver by secretly replacing the tortoise with a bigger one. To make the plan work, He told Mrs. Silver to talk to Alfie every day using the so-called tortoise language to give him more time to implement the plan. Thereafter, Mr. Hoppy went to the pet shop to buy a suitable replaceable tortoise. He ended up getting a number of no less than one hundred and forty tortoises at home. The next thing he did was to handcraft the tool, which is called a “tortoise-catcher,” to pick up the tortoise. After the preparation, Mr. Hoppy began his plan. He picked up Alfie and replaced him with a bigger tortoise every week without being noticed by Mrs. Silver at all. Eight weeks later, Mrs. Silver finally shocked to realize that the tortoise became bigger and credited it to Mr. Hoppy. This success gave Mr. Hoppy the courage to meet Mrs. Silver in person. Nonetheless, Mrs. Silver was a little upset that she had to make a bigger house for the tortoise. That’s when Mr. Hoppy came up with a proposal, which is to use the “magical tortoise language” to shrink the size of the tortoise so that there was no need for the new house. What Mr. Hoppy did was replace the bigger tortoise with a smaller one as what he did previously. Being totally unaware of these, Mrs. Silver thought Mr. Hoppy was a miraculous man. This time Mr. Hoppy was braver and expressed his love to Mrs. Silver. They ended up getting married and lived happily ever after. All the tortoises, including Alfie, were sent back to the pet shop for free. Alfie later was with a much-loved family and finally grew to twice the size he was when Mrs. Silver had him.

Broadly speaking, Alfie is the representative of Wilderness. He is a tortoise and tortoises usually live in the wild. While Mrs. Silver is the female protagonist, as a human, very considerate and kind to Alfie, and she loves Alfie. According to Mr. Hoppy, Mrs. Silver whisper endearment to Alfie and strokes his shell every day. She treats the tortoise as if it is her own child. When the cold weather comes, she would “fill Alfie’s house with dry hay.” (Dahl 14)¹⁰ In early spring, when the hibernation of Alfie finishes, Mrs. Silver would welcome him with great joy. She even worries that Alfie would be sad to grow too slowly, which motivates the story to develop. All of these have shown that Mrs. Silver has a positive, friendly, peaceful relationship with Alfie, the tortoise. From this perspective, it can be concluded that Mrs. Silver has a harmonious relationship with the tortoise. While for Mr. Hoppy, who loves Mrs. Silver and feels “absurdly jealous” of Alfie, he is also friendly and peaceful to Alfie and the other tortoises in the

story. Instead of just eliminating the existence of Alfie, he adopts a close approach to fulfill Mrs. Silver's wish by replacing Alfie with bigger tortoises. When the replacement is taking place, Mr. Hoppy again reveals his love and peace to Alfie. "Hello, Alfie ... You are about to go for a little ride." (Dahl 35)¹⁰ He treats Alfie as a human being. "Hello" is a human greeting expression. Furthermore, the way Mr. Hoppy treats the rest of the tortoises is friendly too. When no less than one hundred and forty tortoises were bought home, Mr. Hoppy treated them nicely and warmly. He feeds the tortoises with water and food: "The floor was swarming with tortoises of different sizes, some walking slowly about and exploring, some munching cabbage leaves, others drinking water from a big shallow dish." (Dahl 31)¹⁰ And he watches his steps to avoid any harm to the tortoises. "Mr. Hoppy had to pick his way carefully on his toes between this moving sea of brown shells. (Dahl 31)¹⁰ In this sense, both Mr. Hoppy and Mrs. Silver are friendly and peaceful to tortoises. In the end, when the "growth" of Alfie is complete, Mr. sent all of the rest of the tortoises back to the pet shop where they can be treated appropriately. Therefore, we can conclude that both Mr. Hoppy and Mrs. Silver have a peaceful and friendly relationship with tortoises, which are the representatives of Wilderness. In this sense, we can see that in *Esio Trot*, humans, and Wilderness have a harmonious relationship. And the relationship is characterized by a sense that Wilderness is not peripheral or subordinate to humans.

4 Dahl's Green Ethics

Since we have argued that in the works of Dahl, there exist both antagonistic and harmonious human-wilderness relationships. To further find out green ethics manifested in the works of Dahl, an analysis of green ethics shown in both human-wilderness relationships is required. In the next two parts, the author will conduct a close textual analysis of the five books chosen in this essay.

4.1 Dahl's Green Ethics Manifested in Antagonistic Human-wilderness Relationship.

This part will focus on the analysis of the main characters in *Mr. Fantastic Fox*, *The Twits*, and *The Enormous Crocodile*: the three farmers, Mr. Fox, *The Twits*, Muggle-Wump, the Roly-Poly Bird, the enormous crocodile, to manifest the green ethics in Dahl's works. We all know the endings of the antagonists are not very happy, with the three farmers still waiting for the foxes, the Twits shrinking and disappearing, and the enormous crocodile being shooting out into the Sun. Therefore, if the shared green ethics in the antagonistic human wilderness are revealed, the green ethics of Dahl can be manifested.

4.1.1 Mr. Fantastic Fox

In *Mr. Fantastic Fox*, generally, the farmers are portrayed as evil humans who hurt animals and use machines to destroy the natural environment, only serving the purpose of their own. Their goal is to kill Mr. Fox, who steals from them and feels nothing

wrong about it. Their evil attitudes to the Foxes were elevated when Mrs. Bean was commenting on Mr. Fox. "You can have the head instead, Mabel. You can get it stuffed and hang it on your bedroom wall. Hurry up now with that cider!" (Dahl 45)⁵ Not only do they want to catch and kill Mr. Fox, but they also want to show off their achievements by making the "head" of Mr. Fox a souvenir on the wall. They even used poison to kill the Rat. They are truly disgusting. But why are they behaving this way? Why do the three farmers and their families become so evil and care nothing about nature? Maybe this can be found in the description of the three farmers. "They were rich men. They were also nasty men. All three of them were about as nasty and meant as any men you can meet." According to the statement in the Twits by Dahl, "A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts they will shine out of your face like sunbeams, and you will always look lovely." (Dahl 5)⁵ From this perspective, we can conclude that maybe the thoughts of the three farmers doing business by killing ducks, chickens, and geese to get rich was the ultimate reason for their evilness. Killing animals made them rich. If we go further into this reasoning of nastiness, we may find something more interesting. It is worth noticing that at the end of the story, when Mr. Fox was proposing to other animals to live together with him, the reason he finds was, "We are all diggers, every one of us. We hate the outside. The outside is full of enemies. We only go out because we have to, to get food for our families." (Dahl 51). What was this "outside"? The natural world? Or human society? Who were their enemies? The entire human species? The answer is quite apparent here. The enemies are nasty people like the three farmers. This possibly why that the three farmers call seen mad by from the viewpoints of other human characters. Dahl did not put too much description on them, but they did exist. They are seen at the race of the digging:

"It was such an extraordinary sight that crowds of people came rushing out from the surrounding villages to have a look. They stood on the edge of the crater and stared down at Boggis and Bunce and Bean. 'Hey there, Boggis! What's going on?'

'We're after a fox!'

'You must be mad!'

The people jeered and laughed." (Dahl 17)⁵

And combing the sad ending of the three games, we can conclude that nasty people who mistreat animals and Wilderness are the humans that Dahl wants to criticize. Mr. Fox, however, representative of Wilderness in the story, is portrayed as a positive character who is smart and fantastic. He always can come up with great ideas to get away from danger. Badger's toast speech at the of the story suggests the impression of Mr. Fox, who is a representative of Wilderness: "I want you all to stand and drink a toast to our dear friend who has saved our lives this day- Mr. Fox!" (Dahl 50)⁵ The reason for this can be that Mr. Fox was smart in the first place, and he can come up with great ideas to save himself and others, including his family:

"And Mrs. Fox said to her children, 'I should like you to know that if it wasn't for your father, we should all be dead by now. Your father is a fantastic Fox.'" (Dahl 10)⁵

Combined with the previous analysis, we see what Mr. Fox did was to protect his family. In conclusion, it can be said that the green ethics in Fantastic Mr. Fox is that

people who mistreat animals and the natural environment will invariably have an unhappy ending.

4.1.2 The Twits

Regarding the antagonists in the Twits, they are epitomes of evil, who are ugly, and stupid because they mistreat others except for themselves. They eat birds and abuse monkeys. The evilness of the couple has been totally disclosed in the way they treat the birds, monkeys, and children. Firstly, they have the “Wednesday Bird Pie” supper every week. Mr. Twit would glue “The Big Dead Tree” with what he called the “hugtight” glue and paintbrush to catch the birds that land on the tree. Considering the ugliness of the Twits, they must have done this for a long time. “It didn’t matter what kind they were – song thrushes, blackbirds, sparrows, crows, little jenny wrens, robins, anything – they all went into the pot for Wednesday’s Bird Pie supper.” (Dahl 20) ⁶ Birds symbolize animals. They are part of nature. The Twits are the devils. Their ugliness is amplified when four children one day accidentally trespass into their garden and are stuck on the branches. Mr. Twit becomes furious when he finds that there are no birds to make the pie. His true nature has been revealed when he claims to make “Boy Pie” instead of “Bird Pie.” But the kids manage to escape. For the monkeys, they are abused. It turns out that the Twits used to be monkey trainers in the circus. Even though there’s retirement, Mr. Twit still sees the monkeys the tool to fulfill his dream of owning the “first great upside-down monkey circus” in the world. The monkeys are tortured to anything Mr. Twit requires, including playing football upside down, balancing one on top the other upside down, etc. Mr. Twit did not care about the situation of the monkeys at all. “He kept them practicing for six hours every day.” (Dahl 23) ⁶. Mrs. Twit also uses her beastly stick to punish the disobedience of the monkeys. From the perspective of the monkey, they are tools for the Twit’s own greedy desires. At this point, it can be definitely concluded that the Twits don’t love animals, the representative of Wilderness, and consider Wilderness their possessions.

For the representative of Wilderness, the Muggle-Wump and the Roly-Poly Bird, are portrayed as generous and helpful. It is also noteworthy that both the Roly-Poly Bird and the Muggle-Wump Monkey are from the continent of Africa, which is said to be the origin of the human species according to recent anthropological studies and the land of Wilderness.

In this sense, it can be concluded that green ethics manifested in the Twits is that whoever mistreats animals, and children and consider Wilderness a possession and a means of one’s desire and greed will end up like the Twits.

4.1.3 The Enormous Crocodile

In terms of the antagonist in the Enormous Crocodile, he is also described as nasty and ugly by Dahl. Compared with the smaller crocodile, the enormous one is called “nasty” and “ugly” several times in the text:

“Of course, they’ll see you,” the Notsobig One said. “You are so enormous and ugly; they’ll see you from miles away.” (Dahl 4) ⁷

The plan of eating children is also called “nasty plans and nasty tricks.”

Combined with the statement of Dahl in the Twits - “if a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face.” (Dahl 4)⁷ In this case, the ugly thought the crocodile has is to eat children. In this sense, the crocodile can be considered a violent representative of Wilderness humans can be hurt and destroyed. Just as the children are seen as a representative of the human species.

But other wilder animals are persistent in protecting innocent children. Without the help of the friendly Wilderness representatives, the tricks of the crocodile will surely be achieved. It is also noteworthy that at the end of the story, it is also this friendly Wilderness that destroys the violent evil wilderness.

Therefore, in this sense, we can see what green ethics manifested in *The Enormous Crocodile* is that Wilderness is sometimes cruel and violent just like the protagonist, the enormous crocodile represents, who is persistent in hurting and destroying humans.

To summarize, in the antagonistic human-wilderness relationships, Wilderness is both violent and friendly. It is depicted as coexisting with the human world rather than peripheral or subordinate to it. It displays a power that cannot be ignored. What Dahl wants to convey through the antagonistic human-wilderness relationships is that Wilderness is both violent and friendly, and should not be considered subordinate to humans, and whoever shows respect to Wilderness would be ended up unhappily.

4.2 Green Ethics in Harmonious Human-wilderness Relationships.

We have discussed green ethics manifested in the antagonistic human-wilderness relationship. This part will adopt the same approach to analyze the human qualities in the harmonious relationship between humans and Wilderness. A significant analysis is drawn on James in *James and the Giant Peach* and Mr. Hoppy and Mrs. Silver in *Esio Trot* since they all have happy endings at the end of the story.

4.2.1 James and the Giant Peach

In *James and the Giant Peach*, James is portrayed as a positive friend to Wilderness, who treat Wilderness friendly and respect Wilderness. James used to be a happy young boy but led a miserable life because of the accidental death of his parents caused by the “angry rhinoceros”. (Dahl 1)⁹ Rhinoceros is an animal species and can certainly be seen as a symbol of Wilderness. Naturally, James should blame Wilderness for losing his family. But he still loves Wilderness and is always dreaming to be in the outside world. In the story, James was extremely keen on the outside world before he started the journey on the peach:

“He used to spend hours every day standing at the bottom of the garden, gazing wistfully at the lovely but forbidden world of woods and fields and ocean that was spread out below him like a magic carpet.” (Dahl 3)⁹

In this regard, can it be said the miserable life of James’ caused by Wilderness was then compensated by the power of Wilderness that everything in this world is balanced, which is why the wilderness representative, namely the old man would come up and offer James “magical” stones? And this seems to align with the other stories of Dahl that nasty evil characters would be punished while kind, good characters would be

happy and live a great life. It is apparent that the whole adventure cannot be done if there is no magical person who came up and offered James the magical “stones or crystals”. (Dahl 11)⁹ But where does this magical little thing come from? In the text, the old man says it was:

“Crocodile tongues boiled up in the skull of dead witch for twenty days and nights with the eyeballs of a lizard! Add the fingers of a young monkey, the gizzard of pig, the beak of green parrot, the juice of porcupine, and three spoonsful of sugar. Stew for another week, and then let the Moon do the rest!” (Dahl 12)⁹

Put simply, the magical stones are made of animals, plants, and time. Tongues, skulls, eyeballs, fingers, and gizzard are all organs of animals (humans are high intelligence animals from the anthropological and ecocritical perspective: while the beak, juice, and sugar are all the products of plants. (Bennet & Royle 165)³ Therefore, the general process of producing the stone is to put into the ingredients of plants and animals and wait for it to complete. To make it even simpler, it can be concluded that the magical stone is the essence of nature. With the development of chemistry, we have known that all the objects in the world or the universe is made of small particles. At this point, we can conclude this magic stone is the essence of Wilderness. Since the stone has the magic to enlarge the peach and humanize creatures, can we say that the magic is from Wilderness, or magic is Wilderness in the story according to Dahl? Furthermore, there is another point to justify this argument, which is the origin of the old man who offered magic stones to James:

“For suddenly, just behind him, James heard a rustling of leaves, and he turned around and saw an old man in a funny dark-green suit emerging from the bushes.” (Dahl 10)⁹

The old man came from the bushes and was wearing a “dark-green” suit. Bushes are plants and “green” are universally considered the color of life and Wilderness. Thus, it can be said the old man is from Wilderness and that is why he can know the recipe for producing magic stones. From this perspective, we find out our first conclusion that magic in the story is the very representation of Wilderness. It is this wilderness power that made the adventure of James possible and it is Wilderness that changed the miserable life story of James to a happy ending, by punishing his evil aunts and making his acquaintances with the animal friends. The peach is also part of the Wilderness since it is a plant.

But why James is the chosen child who can get access to magic? The answer to this question can undoubtedly help to excavate the environmental ethics of Dahl. To summarize, James loves the “world of woods and fields and oceans” so much that they are like magic. Woods, fields, and oceans are part of the Wilderness in ecocriticism definition. James’ love for nature can be manifested in other places in the text. For example, he did not fear human-like creatures at all, although the death of his parents was caused by the representative of Wilderness. When they were in the ocean surrounded by the sharks, they did not try to hurt any of those sharks who are also the violent representatives of Wilderness.

In this respect, we can conclude that James was the chosen one because of two main reasons, despite his other good inner qualities such as positivity, high intelligence, and good commitment to friendship: James loves Wilderness and respects it.

While aunts of James are at the other end of the attitudes to Wilderness. His aunts are generally similar to the Twits. Both Aunt Sponge and Spiker are “really horrible people.” (Dahl, 1)⁹ They are described as “selfish and lazy and cruel.” (Dahl, 1)⁹ James is abused both physically and mentally. They are again described as ugly people by Dahl. As we have suggested in Twits, Dahl refers to ugly people as those who have bad qualities, such as mistreating animals and children. What is more worth mentioning is that the Aunts are extremely frightened of allowing James to embrace Wilderness. When James wants to go to the hill, a symbol of green and Wilderness. Aunt Spiker replied: “The nasty little beast will only get into mischief if he goes out of the garden.” (Dahl, 2)⁹ To the Aunts, Wilderness is evil and can bring mischief. They try all means to prevent James from getting access to Wilderness. Right after James meets his friend Wilderness, his evil aunts get their punishment for mistreating James and their attitudes to Wilderness, they are crushed by the giant peach and “lay ironed out upon the grass as flat and thin and lifeless as a couple of paper cut out of a picture book.” (Dahl, 48)⁹

This comparison between James and his aunts surely allows us to discover the green ethics of Dahl in *James and the Giant Peach*, that is, wilderness is both violent, cruel, and friendly, if one chooses to embrace Wilderness with a friendly and respectful attitude, one will be treated tremendously nice, just as James, who is chosen by nature to embark on a magical journey, while people who hate and fear Wilderness will invariably end up having unfortunates.

4.2.2 Esio Trot

Mr. Hoppy and Mrs. Silver, they are also portrayed as positive and Wilderness friendly. Mr. Hoppy loved flowers and Mrs. Silver, while Mrs. Silver loved Alfie, the tortoise. Due to shyness, Mr. Hoppy dared not to express his love to Mrs. Silver. But after successfully fulfilling Mrs. Silver’s wishes through plans, he dared to confess. The themes of the wishes of Mrs. Silver may give us hints. Let’s see what the wishes of Mrs. Silver were. Her first wish was to hope Alfie can grow faster because she thought that “how miserable it must make him feel to be titchy! Everyone wants to grow up.” (Dahl 20) From this perspective, the first wish was full of the love of Mrs. Silver for Alfie, though it was made from the human’s viewpoint.

To summarize the love relationships, it is clear that the love for animals and the love for plants gave Mr. Hoppy the courage to express his love. But if Mr. Hoppy did not love plants or if he was not a flower person. He would most likely not be able to get the courage to say he loved Mrs. Silver. Furthermore, if this framework is enlarged, it was the love for wilderness that gave Mr. Hoppy the courage. For sure, many other reasons can be found in the text to justify the romance between Mr. Hoppy and Mrs. Silver, but it was also their same living styles or values towards the Wilderness that made them match. Furthermore, Both Mr. Silver and Mr. Hoppy do not consider the Wilderness as a tool or subordinate to humans. They respect Wilderness and have a harmonious relationship with Wilderness.

At this point, we can conclude that in the harmonious human-wilderness relationship, human characters, who have a happy ending in stories of Dahl, invariably respect Wilderness, treat them equally, and have a friendly relationship with elements of

Wilderness, including James, Mr. Hoppy, and Mrs. Silver, while those who hate and fear Wilderness will invariably end up having unfortunates just as the aunts of James.

5 Conclusion

After the previous discussion on the human-wilderness relationships and green ethics, we can conclude that Roald Dahl, a world-class children's literature writer, has been informing the following green ethics to his readers: Wilderness is both violent and friendly, as shown in *The Enormous Crocodile*, and in *James and the Giant Peach*. It is depicted as coexisting with the human world rather than peripheral or subordinate to it. It displays a power that cannot be ignored. Whoever shows no respect for Wilderness would be ended up unhappily, such as the Twits in *The Twits*, and the three farmers in *Mr. Fantastic Fox*. Wilderness is cruel, still, if humans have an environmental mindset, the Wilderness will always reward them, as shown by James and Mr. Hoppy and Mrs. Silver in *James and the Giant Peach*, and Esio Trot. In this sense, we can conclude that the Green ethics of Dahl is that humans should have a harmonious relationship with the physical environment, namely nature. As Anthony Pavlik says in his book – *Children's literature and the ecocritics*:

“At a time when scientific evidence for environmental degradation and species extinction continues to grow, and with many texts created for younger readers now recognizing that “children will not just inherit the future, but need to participate in shaping it” (Reynolds 14), children's literature and its depictions of, and response to, the environment and its current condition would seem to be a vital element in the social narrative regarding the future of the planet.” (5)¹¹

As a major author of children's literature in the modern era, Dahl has had a great impact on shaping children's environmental ethics. By manifesting green ethics in his works, Dahl's contribution to environmental protection can be recognized.

In the end, the author hopes this essay can provide useful contributions to the field of Ecocriticism and children's literature.

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