

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

The relationship between humans and nature is a fundamental aspect of life that has continuously evolved throughout history. From primitive times to the modern era, human interactions with nature have been shaped by shifts in human ways of thinking from mythical and ontological to functional perspectives which ultimately influence how humans perceive and relate to the environment (Hariyono & Aryati, 2018).

In the modern context, this relationship has become increasingly complex. On one hand, humans remain heavily dependent on nature for resources, mental well-being, and survival. On the other hand, industrialization and urbanization have created a sense of alienation from the natural world. This disconnection contributes to a decline in environmental awareness and ecological responsibility (Moghadam et al., 2015). Numerous studies have shown that direct interaction with nature provides significant benefits to mental health, such as reducing stress, anxiety, and cognitive fatigue (Almeida, 2020).

Despite the many benefits nature provides, human actions are often the primary cause of environmental degradation. The exploitation of nature through deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss reflects a severe imbalance in this relationship. The phenomenon known as the "sixth extinction" highlights how human activity has accelerated species extinction on an unprecedented scale (Baum, 2014). Consequently, ethical perspectives on human-nature relations have become increasingly important. Scholars argue that humans should not separate themselves from nature but rather view themselves as integral parts of the ecosystem. Such an ethical approach emphasizes the importance of sustainable development and responsible environmental interaction (Bao-ping, 2006).

In Indonesia, irresponsible environmental exploitation continues to cause significant ecological damage. In 2024, deforestation rose sharply, with approximately 261,575 hectares of forest lost, especially in East Kalimantan due to national strategic projects such as the development of the new capital city, Ibu Kota Nusantara (Hijau Bisnis, 2025). Nickel mining in Central Halmahera has also severely damaged coastal ecosystems, destroying mangrove forests and coral reefs, which in turn has reduced fish catch for local fishermen (Monitor Indonesia,



more, the El Niño phenomenon has increased the risk of forest  
ed by land-clearing practices involving burning (Liputan6, 2024).  
is demonstrate a consistent pattern of human interaction with the  
at is predominantly exploitative, often resulting in greater harm  
his pattern reflects a profound misinterpretation of the human-  
ship, wherein humans regard themselves as separate from and

superior to the natural world. Consequently, environmental ethics are frequently neglected, leading to significant threats to ecological stability. Therefore, it is imperative to raise awareness among individuals and communities about the urgency of environmental issues around them. By cultivating a deeper consciousness of what is happening in their surroundings, people may be more likely to take meaningful action to protect the environment. Promoting ecological awareness is not just about understanding nature intellectually, it is about feeling connected to it emotionally, ethically, and practically in everyday life. Thus, a fundamental transformation in how humans perceive and engage with nature is imperative to foster a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence.

Given the pressing environmental challenges of today's world, literary works that emphasize human-nature relationships have gained increasing importance. This is where ecocriticism emerges as a relevant literary approach. Ecocriticism, coined by William Rueckert (1978) and further developed by scholars like Lawrence Buell and Cheryll Glotfelty, examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It explores how literary texts portray nature, critique human attitudes towards it, and imagine alternative ecological futures. As environmental degradation escalates globally, ecocriticism offers a meaningful way to analyze literature not only as an artistic expression but also as a commentary on ecological awareness.

One literary work that closely aligns with ecocritical concerns is *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, first published in 1911. Burnett, a British-American author widely known for her contributions to children's literature, also wrote other enduring classics such as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) and *A Little Princess* (1905). Despite its classification as a children's novel, *The Secret Garden* offers multilayered themes that continue to engage adult readers. The novel tells the story of Mary Lennox, a spoiled and lonely little girl who, after losing her parents to a cholera epidemic in India, is sent to live with her uncle in Yorkshire, England. During her time there, Mary discovers an abandoned secret garden and begins to care for it. As the garden is restored, Mary and other characters such as Colin Craven undergo significant emotional and physical transformations. Nature in the story serves not only as a setting, but as an active force that encourages growth and healing.

Given the central role of nature in shaping the characters' development, it becomes essential to examine how *The Secret Garden* portrays the human-nature relationship. Through the characters' transformation, the novel suggests that engagement with the natural world leads to emotional, psychological, and physical restoration. This aligns with ecocritical concerns, which emphasize



the transformative role of nature in human life. In light of these the ecocritical analysis of *The Secret Garden* not only enriches the understanding of this literary work, but also raises awareness of the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. This study is relevant in the current era, where environmental issues are becoming a global concern.

## 1.2 Identification of Problem

Based on the novel *The Secret Garden*, the author presents several problems. The issues explored throughout the narrative are:

1. Emotional Isolation and Neglect in Childhood
2. Class Differences and Social Inequality
3. Colonial Setting and Cultural Displacement
4. Absent Parenting and Care Deficiency
5. Gender Roles and Female Agency
6. Character–Environment Interaction

## 1.3 Scope of Problem

Among the various issues identified in *The Secret Garden*, this study focuses on the problem of character interaction with the physical environment throughout the narrative. This includes both indoor and outdoor settings that influence the character's development. This study is limited to the analysis of four central characters, Mary Lennox, Colin Craven, Dickon Sowerby, and Mr. Archibald Craven, whose interactions with space and nature are the most prominent and thematically significant in the novel.

## 1.4 Research Question

Based on the background, identification of problem, and scope of problem above, the researcher proposes the problem into the following research questions:

1. How do the characters in *The Secret Garden* interact with their environment?
2. How does Frances Hodgson Burnett portray human-nature relationships through the narrative of *The Secret Garden*?

## 1.5 Objective of Study

The objective of study are:

1. To analyze the interaction between characters and their environment in *The Secret Garden*.
2. To examine Frances Hodgson Burnett portray human-nature relationships narrative of *The Secret Garden*.



### Objective of Study

This study holds significance in deepening the understanding of the relationship between humans and nature in literature, and how

this interaction reflects and influences human conditions. Additionally, the findings of this research can provide valuable insights for readers to understand how literature can serve as a means to respond to and contemplate the human-nature relationship.

## 1.7 Sequence of Chapter

This research is entitled *Human-Nature Relationship: Analysis of Character-Environment Interaction in The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett*, it consists of five chapters.

1. Chapter One is Introduction. It contains background of study, identification of problem, scope of problem, research question, objective of study, significance of study, and sequence of chapter.
2. Chapter Two is Literature Review. It contains previous related studies, ecocriticism approach, and pertinent ideas
3. Chapter Three is Methodology. It contains methodological design, method of collecting data, method of analysis, and procedure of research.
4. Chapter Four consists of analysis of the novel. This chapter provides overall analysis leading the readers to the findings.
5. Chapter Five is a Conclusion and Suggestion. It consists of the conclusion and suggestion which are relevant to the topic.



## CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Previous Related Studies

The writers found three related studies of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

The first study is from Najma & Herdiana (2019) titled "*Mutual Relationship between Human and Nature on The Secret Garden and Sarongge: an Ecocritical Reading*", this research employ qualitative methods and ecocriticism to elucidate the intricate bond between nature and humans depicted in both *The Secret Garden* and *Sarongge*. The results of the analysis show that the relationship between humans and nature in *The Secret Garden* and *Sarongge* is mutually beneficial. However, this harmonious relationship is in contrast to the historical reality in England and Indonesia which experienced severe environmental damage due to the exploitation of nature.

The second research comes from Siwi et.al (2022), titled "*Treatment of Nature: An Ecocriticism Approach in 'Komat Kamit' of Tejo and Kamba's Tuhan Maha Asik*". The study uses ecocriticism theory and a descriptive qualitative approach. The analysis reveals that *Komat Kamit* symbolizes human gratitude and respect for nature, which is essential for ecological balance and sustainability.

The third study is from Nandita (2022) titled "*Personality Traits of the Two Main Characters as Portrayed in Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden.*" This thesis uses McCrae and Costa's Big Five Personality Traits theory to analyze the personalities of two main characters in *The Secret Garden*, namely Mary Lennox and Colin Craven. The results of the analysis show that Mary has all five dimensions of personality openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism while Colin only shows three dimensions, namely openness, extraversion, and neuroticism. Mary's strong and enthusiastic personality significantly influences Colin's change from a sickly and pessimistic child to a healthier, more active, and optimistic one.

Several previous studies have explored *The Secret Garden* and related literary works through ecocritical and character analysis lenses. Najma and Herdiana (2019), in their study "*Mutual Relationship between Human and Nature on The Secret Garden and Sarongge: An Ecocritical Reading*", use ecocriticism to analyze the mutual relationship between humans and nature depicted in both



comparative study highlights the harmony within the fictional worlds of the real-world environmental damage in England and Indonesia. Siwi et al. (2022) in "*Treatment of Nature: An Ecocriticism Approach in 'Komat Kamit' of Tejo and Kamba's Tuhan Maha Asik*" examine symbolic aspects of human gratitude and respect for nature, emphasizing the importance of ecological balance. Although it employs ecocriticism, the study

does not focus on direct character-environment interactions. On the other hand, Nandita (2022), in her thesis "*Personality Traits of the Two Main Characters as Portrayed in Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden*," analyzes the main characters using the Big Five Personality Traits theory. Her study focuses on internal character development rather than on how nature influences the transformation. In contrast, this research aims to fill the gap by offering a focused ecocritical analysis of *The Secret Garden* through the lens of character-environment interaction.

By examining how the characters' development is deeply intertwined with their experiences in and relationships with the natural environment, this study contributes a more nuanced understanding of the human-nature relationship as portrayed in the novel.

## 2.2. Theoretical Background

### 2.2.1 Intrinsic Element

This section discusses the intrinsic elements of *The Secret Garden*, which include character, setting, plot, theme, and point of view. These elements help reveal how the story is developed and how its messages are conveyed through the narrative.

#### 1. Character and Characterization

In literary studies, a character is an individual in a narrative whose psychological and moral qualities such as thoughts emotions and motivations are revealed through speech and action. The character's traits should be portrayed consistently and in a way that makes sense to the reader whether the character changes throughout the story or stays the same from beginning to end. (Abrams and Harpham, 2011: 32-33). To bring these characters to life authors use characterization which is the way a character is introduced and developed through their speech thoughts actions and how others respond to them. This technique can be direct when the narrator clearly describes a character or indirect when the reader understands the character through their behavior and interaction (Forster, 1927: 73-76). Characters can be described as round when they are complex and show growth or flat when they are simple and do not change throughout the story. By analyzing how characters are built and presented readers can understand deeper layers of the story including its themes conflicts and emotional impact. In conclusion, characters are the

1. Characterization in narrative and characterization is the method that allows them to be meaningful and memorable within the story.

2. In narrative fiction, recognizing the various roles that characters play is vital for understanding how a story unfolds and conveys meaning.

3. An effective approach is to examine the degree to which a character is involved in the plot and the depth of their development. According to Card



(1988), based on their narrative function, characters are commonly categorized into two types:

a. Major Characters

Major characters serve as the central focus of the story and are developed with emotional and psychological complexity. They possess clear motivations, desires, and internal or external conflicts that actively drive the plot forward. What makes them compelling is not just what they do, but how they think and change throughout the narrative. When readers are able to recognize a major character's vulnerabilities and witness their personal growth, they become emotionally invested in their journey. Without sufficient depth, even a protagonist can lose impact and fail to sustain the reader's interest. (Card, 1988: 61–63).

b. Minor Characters

Minor characters, on the other hand, play a supporting role that enriches the story's texture without overshadowing the main narrative. Although their appearances may be brief, they can still provide important functions, such as adding contrast, offering insight, or introducing small-scale conflict. A minor character becomes more believable when given a distinctive trait or a simple personal goal. However, it is important to maintain balance. Giving excessive background or emotional weight to a minor character may unintentionally shift the focus away from the story's core. (Card, 1988: 64–67).

2. Plot

Freytag in his influential work *Freytag's Technique of the Drama* (1900) proposes a five-part structure often visualized as a pyramid, consisting of exposition, rising movement, climax, falling movement, and catastrophe or resolution. Each stage contributes to the narrative rhythm and intensifies the drama.

a. Exposition introduces the main characters, their social conditions, and the setting of the story. It provides the essential background and context that enables the audience to understand the initial situation. Freytag emphasizes that exposition must be clear and efficient to avoid stagnation in the plot's momentum (Freytag, 1900: 119–121).

b. Rising Movement, also called the complication, is the phase where conflicts begin to unfold. Here, the protagonist encounters obstacles, tensions escalate. Freytag notes that during this stage, dramatic tension increases as the stakes grow and the forces of opposition gain momentum and strength (Freytag, 1900: 122–125).

Climax stands at the structural center of the plot and serves as the turning point. It marks the highest point of tension and the decisive moment that determines the course of the remaining narrative.



According to Freytag, the climax should result from the accumulated actions and should embody the core dramatic question of the story (Freytag, 1900: 126–128).

- d. Falling Movement, or the return, follows the climax and reveals the consequences of prior actions. The conflict begins to unravel, and the outcome becomes increasingly inevitable. Freytag describes this phase as a controlled descent, where the drama shifts from suspense to clarification (Freytag, 1900: 129–131).
- e. Catastrophe, or the resolution, concludes the narrative. In tragedies, it involves the protagonist's downfall; in comedies, it restores harmony and order. Freytag asserts that the ending must resolve the central conflict logically and emotionally, bringing the narrative full circle (Freytag, 1900: 132–137).

In summary, Freytag's model presents a classical framework for analyzing plot in dramatic and narrative works. By organizing the plot into a rising and falling arc, his structure highlights the importance of progression, conflict, and resolution. It allows readers and writers alike to understand how events are shaped not just for sequence, but for emotional and thematic impact.

### 3. Setting

In literary theory, setting refers to the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which the events of a narrative occur. According to Abrams, setting encompasses not only the geographical and temporal location of a story, but also the customs, moral values, and social conditions that shape characters' actions and attitudes (Abrams, 1999: 284-285). It functions as a narrative framework that provides atmosphere, contextual significance, and potential conflict within the story's progression.

A more detailed classification of setting is presented by William Kenney (1966: 40) in *How to Analyze Fiction*, in which he categorizes setting into three principal components:

#### a. Setting of Place

This refers to the physical location of the narrative, including geographical features, topography, scenery, and even interior details such as the layout of a room. These spatial details help the reader visualize the world of the story and feel its atmosphere. (Kenny, 1966: 40)

#### Setting of Time

This involves the temporal conditions under which the story unfolds, such as historical period, season, or time of day. Understanding this context helps readers grasp the social and cultural context that influences the characters' decisions and behaviors. (Kenny, 1966: 40)



c. Setting of Society

This aspect combines the character's daily existence including their jobs and lifestyles with the larger social, moral, religious, and emotional environment in which they operate. It reflects the ideologies and norms that shape both conflict and character interaction. (Kenny, 1966: 40).

4. Theme

Understanding theme is essential to grasping the deeper meaning and purpose of a literary work. Theme can be understood as an abstract and overarching insight into human experience, distilled from the concrete details of plot, character, and setting. Rather than being explicitly stated, it emerges gradually as the narrative unfolds, requiring readers to move beyond the text's specific events and characters to formulate a broader reflection on the human condition. As such, theme serves as a key to understanding the deeper purpose of a literary work. (Schirova, 2006: 48). Similarly, theme refers to the underlying insight or worldview that an author presents about human experience through the unfolding of the narrative. It is not directly stated but gradually emerges as events and character actions unfold, thus revealing the author's perspective on life (Kenney, 1966: 90–91). Based on these perspectives, theme is the central and implicit idea about life or human nature, constructed through the interplay of narrative elements and functioning as a unifying force that gives the story its deeper resonance.

### 2.2.2 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, or ecological literary criticism, is a branch of literary theory that explores the relationship between literature and the natural environment. The term *ecocriticism* was first introduced by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, where he proposed using ecological principles to analyze literary texts (Rueckert, 1978: 107). He viewed literature as part of an energy system, reflecting the dynamic exchange between humans and nature.

Ecocriticism gained broader academic attention in the 1990s through the efforts of scholars like Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, whose anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) became a foundational text in this field. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as “*the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment*” (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996: xviii). In the same period, the establishment of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) marked a significant step toward the institutionalization of ecocriticism. One of the most influential contributors to the field is Lawrence Buell, whose *Environmental Imagination* (1995) emphasized that the environment could not be seen merely as background, but as an active agent



that shapes plot, character, and meaning (Buell, 1995: 2–3). Buell introduced the concept of the *environmental imagination* to highlight how texts influence ecological values and consciousness. His ideas bridge the gap between literary studies and environmental ethics, shaping how scholars interpret place and nature in fiction (Buell, 1995: 7–9).

In line with this, ecocriticism has grown into a diverse field, incorporating other perspectives such as postcolonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and themes related to climate change, pollution, and ecological crisis. Sub-branches like material ecocriticism, urban ecocriticism, and marine ecocriticism reflect the theory's growing adaptability and relevance to today's global concerns (Heise, 2008; Iovino & Oppermann, 2014).

Within the framework of ecocriticism, one of the core concepts is the human-nature relationship. According to Glotfelty, literary texts reflect and shape human attitudes toward the environment. This relationship is not static but continually negotiated through narrative. Nature is often portrayed not just as scenery, but as an active force that contributes to emotional and psychological development. As Greg Garrard (2012) points out, literature uses “large-scale metaphors” to describe the interaction between humans and nature. Similarly, Arne Naess (1973), in his deep ecology movement, emphasized that humans and the natural world should relate to one another with mutual respect and equal value.

In *The Secret Garden*, this relationship is central. The novel demonstrates how being immersed in nature fosters healing, emotional growth, and transformation. Characters like Mary Lennox, Colin Craven, and Dickon Sowerby experience personal change through their connection to the natural world. The garden becomes not just a setting but a living force that supports recovery and revitalization, reflecting a romantic and pastoral vision of the natural world.

Closely tied to the human-nature relationship is the concept of character-environment interaction. This idea highlights the dynamic engagement between human beings and the spaces they inhabit. According to Tajane et al. (2024), nature is often personified in literature and portrayed as interacting with human characters. The field of literary geography, as explored by Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place* (1977), supports this idea by asserting that space becomes meaningful through human experience and perception. When characters engage with their environment, the place acquires emotional and symbolic significance, which in turn affects identity and worldview.

Lawrence Buell also emphasized that the environment in literature functions as a character, capable of influencing a character's development. In *The Secret Garden*, this is evident in how Mary's bitterness and isolation begin to heal through her involvement with the garden. Colin's physical and psychological recovery is similarly tied to his exposure to fresh air, nature, and companionship. His engagement with nature results not only in personal transformation but also in the rejuvenation of the garden itself. This illustrates a reciprocal relationship between the characters and the environment.



relationship between characters and environment each shaping the other in meaningful ways.

Despite the richness of perspectives in ecocriticism, this study adopts William Rueckert's theory as its primary framework. The reason for this is that Rueckert directly addresses the ecological function of literature by conceptualizing it as part of an energy system. His focus on the reciprocity between humans and nature, as well as the healing potential of environmental engagement, aligns closely with the central themes in *The Secret Garden*. Unlike theories that focus more on symbolic or metaphorical representation, Rueckert provides a model that supports concrete, mutual, and transformative interactions between human beings and the natural world.

By using Rueckert's ecocritical approach, this study is able to explore how nature in *The Secret Garden* functions not only as a thematic element but also as an agent of change. The analysis will focus on how characters interact with indoor and outdoor environments, and how these interactions shape their identities, relationships, and personal growth ultimately illustrating the novel's vision of ecological harmony and human healing through nature.

