The Magic of *Howl's Moving Castle*: An Analysis of Character Development in a Fantasy Novel

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to examine the influence of magical events on the development of the major character in the novel *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones. The present study uses qualitative approach, particularly descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected by critically selecting the words, phrases, and sentences that reflect events with magical happenings. In analyzing the data, this study employs Nikolajeva's (1988) magic laws and Tolkien's (1966) functions of fantasy. The analysis reveals that the magical events influence the development of the main character through the magic laws, which portray certain functions of fantasy. The magic law that dominantly appears in the novel is consistency (i.e., the idea that the secondary world has rules that must be obeyed). Meanwhile, in terms of functions of fantasy, recovery (i.e., recapture the fundamental vision of things) becomes the dominant function primarily shown. The findings of the present study also indicate that, in the fantasy genre, the development of the character is triggered by the elements of surprise and the element of wonder presented in the novel.

Keywords: *character development, fantasy, magic, magical events*

INTRODUCTION

Fantasy is one of the most popular literary genres. Chadbourn (2008) believes it is because fantasy fulfills people's desire to read for fun and to escape from reality. Unlike science fiction that tends to be more technological and consists of full of big ideas, fantasy fiction is pretty easy to read (Nicole, 2015). Since it sets in a fictional universe full of mystical creatures, fantasy stories give the readers new experiences that are unfeasible in the real world. Through its fantastic elements, fantasy offers a chance to break out from the rational world we get. One of the fantastic elements that commonly appear in the fantasy genre is the presence of magic.

Bailey (2006) defines magic as the use of extraordinary power to make possible something impossible. It means that magic can do things beyond human reasoning. It is the key element which drives fantasy stories (Sammons, 2010; Saricks, 2009). In fantasy stories, the presence of magic usually appears in the form of magical abilities, magical creatures, or magical phenomena. It

helps to advance the whole story to be more interesting by building the tension and struggles for the characters.

An example of fantasy fiction that shows a strong presence of magic is the novel *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones. Set in the early 20th century where magic is commonly used everywhere, the novel tells a story of a young girl named Sophie who is turned into a 90-year-old woman by the witch's curse. Her journey to break the curse has led her into a wizard Howl's moving castle. During her journey, Sophie experiences magical events which force her to deal with magic. In the end, her character develops on impact as she views things differently.

The major character in *Howl's Moving Castle* experiences the change of state after she undergoes the event with magical happenings. It then becomes a turning point for her to go on a magical adventure to complete a mission. Basically, the characters in the fantasy genre always interconnected with magical events

in order to pursue their goals (Nikolajeva, 2002). They start their journey with the help of magic, fight with magic, and, in the end, accomplish their 'happy ending' with the aids of magic as well. The presence of magic in the novel helps to construct the story by creating some challenges for the major character. As she gets along with magic, consequently, it will affect her traits. Over the course of the story, her characters may gradually develop as the result of the magical events she confronts along the journey (Sefton, 2011).

With regard to the importance of the presence of magic in fantasy, there are several studies that have been conducted. For example, a study by Watts (2006) analyzed how magic constructed the logic of the novel *Harry Potter*. This study found that the logic of the novel *Harry Potter* was constructed by making limitations on the magic. There was also a study conducted by an Indonesian student, Hamzah (2008). Her study was carried out to investigate the function of fantasy world for the major characters and how it affected the development of major character. She disclosed that the fantasy world served as a place for the major characters to escape and found their true selves.

The present study also puts interest to investigate the presence of magic in fantasy stories but focuses on the development of the major character only. It attempts to find out how the magical events influence the development of the major character.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Novel and Elements of a Novel
Novel can be defined as a prose narrative in a certain length and complexity that tells an imaginative story that connects a sequence of events which contain conflicts or problems to dramatize human experience (Burgess, n.d.; Grambs, 1982, as cited in Napitupulu, 2010). Hawthorn (2001) states that there are the elements of a novel which are very useful in analyzing fiction: narrative technique, plot, character, structure, setting, theme, symbol and image, and speech and dialogue. Nevertheless, this study will only elaborate the intrinsic elements that

are related to the topic of the study. The elements are theme, plot, setting, and character and characterization.

Theme is the core idea of a story. It may be stated or implied. Based on Jones (1968) explanation, theme is underlying ideas that are presented by the author. Plot is the movement of a story. To be precise, it is an organized sequence of events and actions that build up the story (Hawthorn, 2001). Setting is the social or physical context where the actions in the story occur (Hawthorn, 2001). Kennedy (1983) defines character as an imagined person who occupies the story. It is the person that is represented in a narrative story which has particular qualities: intellectual, emotional, moral qualities that can be interfered from his or her actions or his or her way of speaking (Abrams, 1999).

Character Development

Character is one of important aspects in a story. According to Coles (2010), in fiction, all the intrinsic elements—narrative technique, plot, character, structure, setting, theme, symbol and image, and speech and dialogue (Hawthorn, 2001)—are connected to the characters. All these elements will then help the characters to develop along the story. In a longer story, such as novels, the development of characters becomes an essential matter.

Characters are not only formed with the strengths that make them stands out but also the weaknesses and flaws (Sefton, 2011). They are completed by the background, belief, fears, hopes, that make the characters looks even more real, relatable, and sympathetic to readers. As the story goes by, the characters will be challenged to confront many conflicts which are usually related to their own weaknesses. When the characters undergo some changes after they encounter some conflicts that means the characters have gradually developed (Sefton, 2011).

Fantasy

Fantasy is one of popular genres in novels. There are many ways in defining fantasy. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, fantasy is a narrative genre which is imaginative

and the story depends on the strangeness of the setting and of the characters. While Gates, Steffel, and Molson (2003) define fantasy as an imaginative fiction that allows the readers to explore the mystery of life without limited by place, time, or size.

Functions of Fantasy

In an essay entitled On Fairy Stories, Tolkien (1966, as cited in Sammons, 2010) believes that there are three main functions of fairy stories: recovery, escape, and consolation.

Tolkien (1966, as cited in Sammons, 2010) describes recovery as "regaining a clear view of things" (p.165). It means that, by reading fantasy stories, the readers may find a new vision in seeing every day things in real life. The act of recovery is important since it allows the reader to see most fundamental things in our primarily world afresh (Sammons, 2010). In the primary world, our familiarity towards things makes us less appreciate and "loses a sense of total participation in the natural world" (p. 1979) and fantasy stories let their readers to see the

world in a new and refreshing manner (Pu, 2012). By adding fantastic elements in the story, the readers are given a chance to refresh their appreciation towards many things. Fantasy stories help the readers to see things without possessiveness rather it gives them experience to see things the way it should be seen (Sammons, 2010).

Out of the three functions, Tolkien (1966, as cited in Sammons, 2010) thinks that escape is the main function of fantasy stories. Fantasy helps the readers to escape from the viciousness of world. Tolkien (1966, as cited in Pu, 2012) says that fantasy stories portray the human wills to escape from any hideous things into a more hospitable living to the human life. They find this possibility of a better life in the fantasy world. In addition, fantasy is not merely about escaping from the reality, but also a place to satisfy human's desire. According to Lewis (1975, as cited in Sammons, 2010), fantasy also deals with the fulfillment of wishes. Human has a big curiosity over many things but the real world limits their ability to

explore those things. Hence, they try to create a world that meets their longing.

The last function mentioned by Tolkien is consolation. Consolation has a deep connection with escape element. Based on Tolkien (1966, as cited in Sammons, 2010) explanation, fantasy stories often give consolation by filling the desires we have in order to escape from the world's misery. The most common consolation found in fantasy stories is the happy ending. Tolkien calls this consolation as *Eucatastrophe*. *Eucatastrophe* means a "joyful overturning" (Stit, 2009, para. 8) and surprising turn of events from a remorseful situation to happiness (Pu, 2012; Stit, 2009).

Magical Events

Magic has become an essential element that attached to fantasy. It serves to advance the whole story becomes more interesting. The addition of magic into the story will affect the unity of the story itself; including the event that happens in it. Since magic is the key element of fantasy, the event that happens is

also connected to magic. Magical event has a similar nature as the event that is usually found in the story. What makes it different is that magical event is typically attached to the fantasy genre. Stableford (2009) defines magical event as the event that happens in the fantasy story invokes fantastic elements in it; which result in the happening of a peculiar effect.

Magic Laws in Fantasy

Nikolajeva (1988) defines magic laws as rules applied in fantasy stories to build up an imaginary world. Fantasy authors have the authority to create the laws within the story and the whole elements of the story must obey them, including the readers. According to Grenby (2008), through fantasy novels, the author tries to present an alternative reality which is controlled and structured by strict rules.

In the book The Magic Code: The use of magical patterns in fantasy for children, Nikolajeva (1988) discusses the presence of magic law in fantasy stories. After studying many fantasy texts, she

finds that there are two types of magic law commonly found in fantasy stories: limitation and consistency.

As the key element to fantasy, magic cannot be limitless and unrestrained. Nikolajeva (1988) explains the magic that is framed in the book should have limitations. By limitations, she means that the magic, or how the magic can be practiced, must be limited. Unlimited magic will only create chaos since everything can absolutely happen (Watts, 2006). Moreover, she also adds that unlimited magic removes the credibility of the story by offering irrational events.

Another important point to magic laws is consistency. Consistency related a lot to the secondary world presented in fantasy stories. Nikolajeva (1988) and Wills (2006, as cited in Amelis, 2013) emphasize that the secondary world should have a physical nature that is comprehensible and logical in its own so that it is acceptable to the readers. Consistency helps to create the logic to the secondary world which is important in order to make

fantasy stories believable (Yolen, 1982, as cited in Nikolajeva, 1988). By consistency, it means that the secondary world in the story should be constructed rationally by making the laws and obeying them.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses descriptive qualitative approach in order to find out the influence of the magical events to the development of the major character in the novel Howl's Moving Castle. This method is chosen since the collected data will be processed to derive meanings in the form of narrative rather than numbers. Moreover, according to Patton (2002, as cited in Suri, 2011), descriptive qualitative approach aims to learn how people behave in society, for instance how people think, behave, and feel at a certain time. Hence, this method is appropriate to be applied in this study as this study explores the development of the major characters in the story.

The data were collected from the novel by focusing on the magical events happen to the major character,

Sophie. The data were collected by critically selecting the words, phrases, and sentences which were analyzed as textual evidence for answering the research question.

In order to uncover how magical events influence the major character development, the collected data were then analyzed and interpreted through connecting the magical events with Nikolajeva's (1988) magic laws and Tolkien's (1966) functions of fantasy. The selected magical events were categorized into magic laws. This approach operates as a tool to find out how the magic works in the story. The next step was to determine the functions of fantasy. This framework operates to examine the effect of the laws on Sophie's character. After the magic laws and functions of fantasy were determined, the impacts of these elements on the development of Sophie's character can be seen. A more detailed explanation about Sophie's character development was presented subsequently.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis reveals that there are six magical events which mainly influence the development of Sophie's character: (1) The cursed eldest of three, (2) The Witch of the Waste's curse, (3) Sophie's entrance into Howl's Moving Castle and her bargain with Howl's fire demon, (4) Sophie's arrival in a strange country, (5) The relocation of the moving castle's house, and (6) Sophie's fights with the Witch of the Waste. These magical events influence the development of character Sophie through the laws of magic that portray certain function of fantasy. The data analysis also reveals that the magic law that mainly influences the development of Sophie's character is consistency (i.e., the logical construction of the secondary world by creating and obeying the rules). Meanwhile, in terms of functions of fantasy, recovery (i.e., regaining a refresh appreciation toward things) becomes the dominant function that shapes Sophie's character development.

The magical events that Sophie has gone through have made

Sophie develops into a more positive character. Although Sophie's physical appearance turned unattractive due to the witch's curse, it is precisely this physical change that makes Sophie grow stronger. Her body may feel the aches and pain of an old woman, but she finds herself freer. Her old appearance turns out to liberate her from the self-consciousness that troubles her before. When Sophie is in her young appearance, she feels inferior in her helplessness. She has low self-esteem and is too resigned for everything happens to her. However, as she changes into a 90-year-old woman, she feels the authority within her. She can do the things that her young form is unable to do. Furthermore, the magical journey makes her realize that her life is not as bad as she always thought. Thus, she becomes more appreciative of her life and her own self.

From the analysis, the writer finds some similarities in terms of magic laws found in each magical event. The dominant similarity is that the magic laws serve as the element of surprise for the character.

According to Amelis (2013), the element of surprise means an unexpected turning point of something that is initially predictable. In the novel Howl's Moving Castle, the magic laws create struggles for Sophie's goals. It can be seen from the change of state that the major character experienced. Sophie who has been pampered with a proper life and has an excellent educational background faces an unexpected turn when she becomes the cursed eldest of three. Her surprising fate as the eldest of three, who happened to be the unluckiest among her siblings, badly affects Sophie's personality. She changes from an optimistic young girl into a gloomy person. However, there is also major difference found from those six magical events: how these laws serve as the barrier. In one magical event, the law operates as the rules of magic, in which the way magic is possible to be used; meanwhile, in other magical events, the law acts as the laws for magic: the limitation on how the magic is allowed to be used (Watts, 2006).

In terms of functions of fantasy, there is also a major similarity found among the six magical events. All of them serve as the element of wonder. The element of wonder can be defined as the idea of seeing things that are extraordinary in one's point of view (Amelis, 2013). The functions of fantasy allow the major character to look at things which are impossible to see in her usual condition. Tolkien (1966, as cited in Pu, 2012) believes that human has that kind of desire to flee from any hideous things into a more hospitable living. They are wondering whether there is a place to satisfy that desire for quality that they do not have. Take an example, Sophie's unfortunate has brought her to get cursed by the Witch of the Waste. However, rather than being depressed over her old-look, her new state, unexpectedly, gives her a chance to flee her dull life. It fulfills Sophie's longing to go on a journey and find her fortunes which are unfeasible and cannot be done under her ordinary condition. Moreover, the element of wonder also helps Sophie to recover a refreshing vision toward many things. As she experiences various magical events, she regains lots of new things that she might lose to see beforehand. She finds herself braver and stronger. She even discovers a new world beyond her land. More importantly, she recovers her hidden magical ability. Tolkien (1966) argues that the journey of recovery will give a certain way of looking at seeing everyday things in life. Through this recovery, she has chances to refresh her appreciation towards things in her life, especially toward her own self (Pu, 2012).

In a fantasy story, the presence of both magic laws and functions of fantasy is essential, for they run as parts of the magic system. This magic system works to construct a unity of the story (Nikolajeva, 1988; Sanderson, 2009). Sanderson (2009) further mentions, since character is an essential element of the story, the construction of the characters also are affected by this system. This magic system forces Sophie to work harder for her goal. Moreover, the struggles she confronts during her journey also require her to be

cleverer to overcome her problems. As the element of surprise, their existence functions as a wall to the desire of the major character (Nikolajeva, 1988). It awfully hits Sophie's comfortable zone. As a result, her personalities are also shaken. Her bravery to walk off from her personal zone is the turning point of her character development. The elements of wonder then bring her to discover things beyond her world. This process of recovery leads her to the point of maturity (Tolkien, 1966, as cited in Pu, 2012). From this explanation, it can be seen that Sophie's character development is triggered by the element of surprise, as shown in the novel. Then, the element of wonder assists as the recovery agent that influences the growth of the major character.

In addition, the whole findings indicate that magic in fantasy stories serves as the surprising turns of something that is unpredictable which operates as the elements of wonder that help the growth of the character. Regarding the issue of character development, the changes shown by Sophie signify

the influence of magic on the development of its protagonist; from a lack of self-esteemed youth to a mature person who has more confidence in herself. In other words, as the protagonist, Sophie experiences a shift from an immature teenage girl who constantly blames life as unfair to a mature and wiser person.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it can be concluded that the major character developed through six magical events: (1) The cursed eldest of three, (2) The Witch of the Waste's curse, (3) Sophie's entrance into Howl's Moving Castle and her bargain with Howl's fire demon, (4) Sophie's arrival in a strange country, (5) The relocation of the moving castle's house, and (6) Sophie's fights with the Witch of the Waste. Each magical event portrays certain magic laws which then lead the major character to uncover particular functions of fantasy. In terms of magic laws, the analysis shows that consistency (i.e. the applied rules in the secondary world that must be

obeyed) is the dominant law that mainly influences the development of Sophie's character. Meanwhile, recovery (i.e. renewed view in seeing things) becomes the function of fantasy which affects her development the most.

Since the magical events work as the transition from one magical condition to another that is experienced by the major character, it leads to the process of the major character's development. In the beginning, Sophie suffers from low self-confidence because of her doomed life. As the magical events go on, she transforms to be a braver person and has more confidence in herself. She also turns out to be a wiser person. In this way, Sophie's character has gradually developed to the betterment of herself after she undergoes some changes through the magical events she experienced.

In addition, the result indicates that magic in fantasy stories serves as parts of the magic system that works to construct a unity of the story. In relation to the character development, it works as the element of surprise and the element of

wonder that become the trigger to the major character development. In its process, the major character undergoes a progressive shift from an immature girl who thinks that life is so unfair to be a mature and wiser person.

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