

## ECOFEMINIST RESISTANCE IN ROBERT STROMBERG'S *MALEFICENT 1* (2014): THE STRUGGLES OF WOMEN AND NATURE AGAINST PATRIARCHAL DOMINATION

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to examine the struggles of Maleficent's character in Robert Stromberg's *Maleficent* (2014) to assert her existence as both a woman and a guardian of nature. It uses Karen J. Warren's ecofeminist theory, which explains how patriarchal domination connects the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. The film *Maleficent* (2014) serves as the primary data source. This study applies a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected through close observation of the film's narrative, dialogue, and character development. The analysis was conducted using a contextual approach, guided by Klarer's literary theory and Warren's ecofeminist framework, particularly focusing on the concepts of the logic of domination, sexism, and naturism. The findings reveal that Maleficent's resistance through the creation of protective boundaries, leadership of the Moors, and reclamation of her agency mirrors the broader resilience of women and nature under patriarchal systems. The study concludes that the film presents an alternative narrative where healing, protection, and empowerment appear through feminine strength and ecofeminist values.

**Keywords:** *Ecofeminism, Patriarchal Domination, Maleficent, Environmental Exploitation, Women's Resistance*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In today's literary and cultural studies, the issue of patriarchal domination stays a major concern in discussions about power, identity, and representation. Despite growing awareness and progress in gender equality, men still largely hold positions of power. For example, recent data from 2024 shows that 71.6% of the United States Congress is made up of men. This reflects a wider pattern of gender imbalance in leadership, politics, and decision-making.

Popular culture, especially film, is

one of the most influential forces in shaping society's beliefs and values. Movies often reflect the realities of the world we live in, and at the same time, they can either reinforce or challenge social norms. Many films have portrayed women as emotional, weak, or dependent on men (Vyomakesisri et al., 2019). Even films that spotlight female empowerment such as *Brave* (2012) or *Moana* (2016) often use within male-dominated frameworks. However, *Maleficent 1* (2014), directed by Robert Stromberg, offers something different. It reimagines a classic fairy tale by focusing on a

woman who is not only a victim of betrayal but also becomes a symbol of power, resistance, and healing. This makes the film an interesting and important object of study, especially when viewed from a feminist and ecological perspective.

The study of women's resistance in literature has evolved significantly, reflecting broader social developments and the moving scene of feminist theory. Early feminist literary criticism regularly centered on the portrayal of women as victims within patriarchal narratives, emphasizing their oppression and marginalization. However, more modern analyses have moved towards exploring the office and versatility of especially female characters and their resistance to patriarchal structures (Putriani et al., n.d.). While many scholars have discussed gender issues in film, there is still limited research that combines feminist theory with environmental criticism especially through the lens of ecofeminism. This study explores that intersection by addressing two main research questions:

- 1) How is patriarchal domination represented through the oppression of Maleficent and the Moors in the film?
- 2) In what ways does Maleficent's resistance reflect ecofeminist values in her defense of both female agency and nature?

This research aims to explore the intersection of gender and ecological oppression in *Maleficent* (2014) using Warren's ecofeminist framework. It analyzes how the film critiques patriarchal power by linking female suffering with environmental exploitation and how it portrays women and nature as agents of resistance. Theoretically, this study contributes to feminist literary discourse by applying ecofeminism to a widely consumed popular film.

Practically, it encourages readers to critically assess how media narratives shape beliefs of gender and the environment, promoting a more inclusive and ethical understanding of both.

The first question is important because it helps uncover the ways patriarchal power use in the film. By analyzing how Maleficent and the Moors are oppressed, the research highlights how domination over women and nature often happens together and follows similar patterns. This reveals how patriarchal systems justify control through violence, betrayal, and destruction. Understanding this helps us see that what happens to Maleficent is not just personal it is part of a larger structure of power.

The second question is equally important because it focuses on resistance and recovery. It shows how Maleficent does not remain a victim but instead becomes a powerful figure who reclaims her space and protects others. Her actions reflect the values of ecofeminism: unity, care, boundaries, and healing rather than domination. This challenges traditional ideas about power and offers new ways to think about leadership, especially female and environmental agency.

The title reflects a broader and deeper critical lens. *Maleficent* is chosen as the object of study because the film presents a clear narrative of betrayal, control, and resistance both over a woman's body and nature's autonomy. Maleficent is betrayed and physically violated (her wings are cut off) in the pursuit of male power. This moment parallels the destruction of the Moors, her natural homeland. The film therefore becomes a rich site for examining how patriarchal violence manifests in both ecological and feminist terms.

This research uses Karen J. Warren's theory of ecofeminism, which argues

that systems of domination such as sexism and environmental exploitation are interrelated and stem from the same patriarchal logic. According to Warren, the devaluation of women and the environment is underpinned by a hierarchical dualism that emphasizes control, rationality and separation (Warren, n.d.). In *Maleficent*, the oppression of the protagonist and the Moors directly align with Warren's framework, so this theory is very proper to analyze the deeper symbolic layers of the film. The oppression of the protagonist and the Moors directly align with Warren's framework, making the theory particularly apt for analyzing the film's deeper symbolic layers.

This research has both theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, it contributes to feminist literary and film studies by applying ecofeminism to a widely known and accessible film. It offers a fresh perspective on how media can explore themes of gender and environmental justice at the same time. Practically, this study encourages viewers, especially students and young audiences, to think more critically about the media they consume. It shows that films are not just for entertainment but can also carry powerful social and political messages. By analyzing *Maleficent* through an ecofeminist lens, this research helps raise awareness about the ways in which stories reflect and challenge real-world issues of gender and ecological oppression.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is not merely a summary of previous research but a critical and integrative analysis that situates the current study within the broader academic discourse. It identifies key themes, evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of existing scholarship, exposes potential biases, and highlights research gaps that justify the present study. In this context, the current

research investigates the intersection of female oppression and environmental degradation in the film *Maleficent 1* (2014) using Karen J. Warren's ecofeminist theory. This review aims to assess how prior studies have contributed to the understanding of patriarchal dominance, female resistance, and ecofeminism in literature and film and how they fall short of fully capturing the multilayered dynamics explored in this study.

Several relevant works inform this research. (Zelviana, 2017), in her study on *The Huntsman: Winter's War*, employs Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics to analyze how female characters, though portrayed as powerful, remain constrained by societal norms. Her analysis effectively illustrates the tension between gender representation and traditional expectations. However, her focus remains solely on gender without incorporating environmental dimensions, which limits the scope of her critique. Similarly, (Asturi & Rosyidi, 2022) in their research of *The Mango Season* by Amulya Malladi, utilize deconstruction and patriarchy theory to reveal how male dominance leads to the marginalization of women. While their study provides a robust framework for analyzing gender inequality, it remains text-bound and lacks consideration of visual narrative strategies specific to film, as well as the symbolic relationship between female characters and nature.

Critically evaluating these studies reveals important limitations. Both works focus on gender oppression, but neither explores how patriarchal structures also subjugate nature, a central theme in ecofeminist philosophy. Furthermore, they pay little attention to the emotional and psychological consequences of oppression, an area that is crucial in understanding the complexity of a character like Maleficent. These omissions point to a significant research gap: the need for a holistic framework that addresses the intersection of gender, emotion, and ecological damage in patriarchal narratives.

Karen J. Warren's ecofeminist theory provides a more comprehensive approach. Her concept of the “logic of domination”

identifies the structural link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, grounded in dualistic and hierarchical thinking (Warren, n.d.). Warren argues that both women and the natural world are devalued and dominated under patriarchal ideologies, and this perspective is particularly useful for analyzing the symbolic connections between Maleficent and the Moors in the film. Her wings, violently removed by Stefan, symbolize bodily autonomy and feminine power, while the burning and invasion of the Moors represent ecological destruction. These acts are not isolated but interconnected violations driven by patriarchal ambition, which the film critiques.

The current study, therefore, addresses the deficiencies in previous literature by applying Warren's theory to a visual narrative and exploring how *Maleficent* portrays not only resistance to male domination but also ecological restoration. Through her transformation from victim to protector, Maleficent embodies both emotional healing and environmental resistance, reflecting ecofeminist values. Unlike the prior studies, this research incorporates a context-oriented film analysis, as proposed by (Klarer, 2023), which enables a deeper understanding of the socio-political significance of cinematic symbols, characters, and narrative structures.

In terms of methodological strength, this research benefits from its interdisciplinary approach, blending feminist theory, ecological critique, and film analysis. However, a critical evaluation must also acknowledge its limitation: it is a single-film case study, which may restrict its generalizability. Nevertheless, this focused analysis allows for rich, in-depth interpretation and provides a solid foundation for future comparative research.

In conclusion, this literature review synthesizes existing scholarship on gender oppression in literature and film while critically evaluating its scope and limitations. It identifies a notable gap in the integration of ecofeminism and psychological analysis, which the current study fills. By doing so, this research not

only extends the application of ecofeminist theory to visual narratives but also contributes a nuanced understanding of resistance, healing, and empowerment in patriarchal contexts.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a context-oriented approach to analyze the depiction of gender and ecological oppression in the film *Maleficent 1* (2014), directed by Robert Stromberg. The approach emphasizes understanding the relationship between text and its broader social, political, and cultural context (Klarer, 2023). This method allows for a comprehensive interpretation of the film's narrative, symbolism, and character development, especially in relation to gender and environmental issues.

The primary theory applied in this study is Karen J. Warren's ecofeminism, which highlights the parallels between the oppression of women and nature in patriarchal frameworks. Warren's framework; includes the concepts of sexism and naturism, and critiques the logic of domination that sustains gender and environmental hierarchies (Warren, n.d.).

#### 3.1 Object of the Study

The object of this research is the film *Maleficent 1* (2014), produced by Walt Disney Pictures and written by Linda Woolverton. This film offers a reinterpretation of the classic story of *Sleeping Beauty*, placing emphasis on Maleficent's character and illustrating her journey from betrayal to resistance and transformation.

#### 3.2 Data Collection Technique

The data were collected by watching the film multiple times to identify relevant scenes, character expressions, dialogue, and narrative structures. These elements were carefully transcribed and categorized based on their relevance to themes of

oppression and resistance. In addition to direct observation of the film, secondary sources such as previous academic analyses, reviews, and theoretical texts were consulted to provide contextual depth and support the interpretation process.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Technique

The analysis and presentation of data in this research follow a descriptive qualitative approach using thematic categorization based on Karen J. Warren's ecofeminist theory. The process involves both analyzing and presenting data in a way that clearly illustrates the film's portrayal of gender and ecological oppression, as well as the resistance against it.

The analysis follows these steps:

- 1) Identifying key scenes that depict acts of oppression toward Maleficent and the Moors.
- 2) Classifying the forms of oppression based on ecofeminist categories: sexism (toward Maleficent) and naturism (toward the Moors).
- 3) Interpreting how these scenes reflect patriarchal domination and
- 4) how Maleficent's actions resist such domination.
- 5) Drawing conclusions on how the film represents women's and nature's struggles under male domination.

For the data presentation, each finding is described and organized thematically. Visual and narrative elements such as dialogue, setting, character actions, and symbols are presented in detail to support the interpretation. These are then linked to theoretical concepts, particularly Warren's logic of domination, to show how patriarchal values are embedded within the film's structure.

By combining analytical steps with

descriptive presentation, the data is not only categorized but also contextualized and interpreted critically. This methodological structure supports the aim of revealing how ecofeminist values are embedded within the film's narrative, offering a deeper understanding of the symbolic relationship between female agency and environmental defense in popular media.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section objectively presents the findings of the study based on the film *Maleficent 1* (2014) without interpretation. The findings are directly aligned with the research questions, focusing first on the steps taken by the king of the human kingdom to dominate the Moors and, second, on the actions taken by Maleficent to defend the forest and her powers. This section interprets the previously outlined findings using Karen J. Warren's theory of ecofeminism, which highlights the interconnected oppression of women and nature under patriarchal systems. The analysis also contextualizes the findings within relevant scholarly research to underscore the broader implications of Maleficent's story.

### 4.1. Kings of Humans Oppress the Moors

The first set of findings illustrates how the king of the human kingdom asserts domination over the Moors. The film depicts King Henry initiating a full-scale military invasion of the forest, viewing the Moors not as a realm to be respected but as a territory to be conquered. This is visually supported by his order to "crush them," issued to his troops as they storm into the forest with swords and fire. This aggressive approach is repeated when King Stefan, Henry's successor, orders his soldiers to burn the Moors using fireballs. These events reflect a violent effort to subdue the natural world for political gain and royal expansion.

Another critical finding is Stefan's betrayal of Maleficent. After earning her trust, Stefan drugs Maleficent while she is asleep and cuts off her wings, which are later presented to the dying king as proof of victory over the Moors. This act is central to Stefan's ascension to the throne. Later in the film, Stefan again attempts to eliminate Maleficent using iron restraints a material known to weaken her powers. These sequences objectively present a pattern of systemic violence against a powerful female figure who is deeply connected to nature.

#### **4.2. Maleficent Defends the Moors**

In response to the oppression she faces, Maleficent takes several notable actions to protect the Moors and reassert her power. One of her first defensive acts is constructing a massive wall of thorns to surround the Moors, thereby creating a physical and symbolic barrier against further human invasion. This wall becomes a visual representation of her separation from and resistance to the human world.

Another significant action is Maleficent's decision to curse Princess Aurora during her christening. The curse stating that Aurora will fall into a death-like sleep on her sixteenth birthday unless awakened by true love's kiss is both strategic and emotional. Though it initially appears to be an act of vengeance, it places psychological pressure on Stefan and becomes a pivotal moment in the power dynamics between the human kingdom and Maleficent.

Finally, Maleficent defends the Moors by leading the magical creatures into battle against King Stefan's army. This climactic event highlights her as both a military and moral leader, using her regained wings and magic to protect her homeland. The scene visually affirms her role as the true guardian of the Moors,

reclaiming her power through unity and strategic resistance.

#### **4.3. Oppression of Nature Through Sexism**

The invasion and destruction of the Moors by King Henry and King Stefan reflect the ecofeminist concept of naturism, as described by Warren. In this view, nature is perceived as subordinate to human (especially male) authority and is thus considered exploitable. The king's militarized attack on the Moors symbolizes how patriarchal power views nature as something to be conquered and consumed for personal and political benefit. The burning of the forest and the effort to breach Maleficent's protective wall further represent the systemic violence inflicted upon ecosystems by hierarchical structures that prioritize domination over harmony.

These findings mirror real-world systems where natural environments are destroyed for economic or political gain. As Warren argues, the same logic that devalues and exploits nature also enables the subjugation of women (Warren, n.d.). The Moors, a place of peace and magic, are violently disrupted not because of inherent danger, but because they pose a challenge to patriarchal control.

#### **4.4. Oppression of Women Through Sexism**

Stefan's betrayal of Maleficent and the symbolic removal of her wings represent a clear manifestation of sexism within ecofeminist analysis. Her wings, a metaphor for autonomy, power, and identity, are stolen from her while she is unconscious mirroring real-world gender-based violence and control. Warren's oppression stresses that patriarchal systems maintain dominance by suppressing women's freedom, voice, and bodily integrity. Stefan's act is not only personal but also political, as it secures his position of power while simultaneously

silencing a powerful woman (Warren, n.d.).

The use of iron to trap Maleficent later in the film further illustrates the calculated, systemic efforts to suppress her. These acts serve to remind the viewer that women's strength is often feared and must, in the eyes of patriarchal figures, be neutralized. This aspect of the film aligns with previous studies, such as (Zelviana, 2017), which show that female characters are frequently depicted as threats that must be contained rather than leaders to be respected.

#### **4.5. Maleficent as an Ecofeminist Resister**

Maleficent's acts of resistance creating the thorn wall, cursing Aurora, and leading the ultimate battle are emblematic of ecofeminist defiance against domination. Her wall serves not only as a shield but as a symbol of reclaimed sovereignty. The curse she casts on Aurora subverts traditional patriarchal values, particularly the myth of "true love's kiss" as a male-centered form of salvation. Ultimately, it is Maleficent's maternal affection that breaks the curse, challenging the belief that power or love must be mediated through men.

In the ultimate battle, Maleficent becomes more than a character she is a metaphor for environmental and feminine strength in unity. She does not seek revenge but justice, using her leadership to defend rather than destroy. Her character proves how those who have been oppressed can transform pain into purposeful action and protect both people and places.

#### **4.6. Maleficent as an Ecofeminist Resister**

Maleficent's resistance to this domination is deeply aligned with ecofeminist values. Her construction of a thorn wall around the Moors is both a strategic defense and a symbolic assertion of ecological sovereignty. She sets boundaries not just to protect herself but to safeguard the land that patriarchal forces look to invade. Her curse upon Aurora, while initially framed as revenge, is later transformed into a challenge to the patriarchal myth of "true love's kiss." By rewriting the terms of

salvation to center on maternal care rather than male romantic love, Maleficent reclaims the narrative from a patriarchal worldview.

In the ultimate battle, Maleficent leads the magical creatures of the Moors not to conquer but to protect. Her leadership is not rooted in domination, but in solidarity, empathy, and restoration. These values contrast sharply with those exhibited by King Stefan, whose rule is marked by paranoia, isolation, and destruction. Through her journey, Maleficent shifts from a victim to a protector and from a feared outsider to a respected leader. Her actions show that both women and nature are not inherently weak they are powerful agents of resistance capable of reclaiming balance and justice.

This resistance reflects what (Bere & Arianto, 2019) observed in their analysis of Hurston's *Sweat*, where "women who experience oppression took the resistance as a form of struggle over their existence as women". Just as the character Delia resists her husband's violence through emotional endurance and moral strength, Maleficent transforms her suffering into action that safeguards not only herself but also the natural world. In both cases, female resistance does not rely on returning violence with violence but on asserting autonomy, protecting sacred spaces, and ultimately restoring dignity. These narratives reveal that women's resistance can emerge from positions of pain and silence, evolving into powerful acts of agency and care.

By examining Maleficent through Warren's ecofeminist lens and supporting the findings with relevant feminist literature such as Bere and Arianto's, this discussion affirms that women's resistance is deeply intertwined with ecological preservation. It illustrates that the fight against patriarchal domination must include both gender justice and environmental awareness. Through Maleficent, audiences are invited to recognize the strength that lies in care, boundaries, and feminine leadership, a message that resonates both within the story and in broader societal struggles.

## 5. CONCLUSION

After analyzing *Maleficent 1* (2014) through the lens of Karen J. Warren's ecofeminist theory, this study concludes that the film powerfully represents how patriarchal systems oppress both women and nature through the same logic of domination. The narrative illustrates that male power is often exercised by exerting control over what is perceived as weaker namely, women and the environment. The intersection of sexism (oppression of women) and naturism (oppression of nature), as outlined in Warren's ecofeminism, is evident throughout the film.

The first conclusion is that patriarchal control is exercised through violence and exploitation, as seen in the actions of King Henry and King Stefan. Their desire to conquer the Moors and strip Maleficent of her wings reveals the patriarchal tendency to dominate both nature and female autonomy. The Moors, which symbolize natural harmony and independence, are invaded, burned, and desecrated for the sake of political gain, reflecting Warren's concept of nature as subordinate in patriarchal logic.

The second conclusion centers on Maleficent's resistance, which is portrayed not as revenge, but as a reclamation of power. Her creation of a protective thorn wall, her leadership during the decisive battle, and her breaking of Aurora's curse through maternal love all illustrate a shift from destruction to healing, from domination to protection. These acts reveal the possibility of resistance rooted in empathy, solidarity, and care key values of ecofeminism. Maleficent's journey from betrayal to empowerment redefines strength through emotional resilience and ecological consciousness.

Ultimately, *Maleficent* is not just a retelling of a fairy tale, it reflects real

social and environmental struggles. The film exposes how patriarchal systems sustain power by devaluing both women and nature and offers a compelling alternative where healing, leadership, and justice come from feminine strength and ecological balance.

This study underscores the value of ecofeminist theory—particularly Karen J. Warren's framework—not only as a tool for analyzing gender and environmental oppression in media but also as a means of envisioning resistance and empowerment. Films like *Maleficent* demonstrate how popular culture can challenge patriarchal norms and reframe feminine qualities such as care, balance, and leadership as strengths, thereby reshaping public understanding of gender roles and ecological ethics.

These insights carry important implications: theoretically, they affirm ecofeminism's relevance in literary and film studies; culturally, they reveal media's power to question dominant ideologies; and socially, they highlight the deep connection between gender-based violence and environmental exploitation, urging a more integrated approach to justice. To build on this work, future researchers should apply ecofeminist analysis to a wider range of films and texts across genres and cultures—including comparative studies of Eastern and Western media—and explore audience reception to understand how viewers interpret these themes. Literature and film students, in turn, should be encouraged to use ecofeminism and other critical theories to analyze both canonical works and contemporary media, fostering deeper critical thinking. Finally, educational institutions, especially in literature, gender studies, and environmental humanities—should integrate ecofeminism into their curricula through

interdisciplinary approaches that help students recognize the vital links between social equity, gender justice, and environmental sustainability.

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