

THE VOICE OF THE FOREST: AN ECOCRITICAL AND ANTHROPOCENE PERSPECTIVE ON NATURE, POWER, AND HUMAN IMPACT IN MALEFICENT

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ABSTRACT

The movie *Maleficent* by director Robert Stromberg in 2014 is a retelling of the *Sleeping Beauty* story with a strong ecological message. The storyline and the visual components of the movie are allegorical to the environment and tell of the concerns of the Anthropocene that resulted from human-induced destruction of ecosystems through industrialization deforestation and species extinction. *Maleficent*, as she transforms from a protector of nature into a vengeful and, later, reconciliatory being personifies the results brought about by the exploitation of the natural world. When analyzed through ecocritical views, nature stars in the film act as a stimulus to criticize the patriarchal dominance exercised on women and their world. The maternity that links *Maleficent* to Aurora is a message not only about the role of nature in nurturing but the way humanity should act as the guardian of the Earth for future generations. *Maleficent* represents the politics of much newer environmental movements concerned with conserving and sustaining the ecologies through the prisms of eco-feminism and the Anthropocene, that is, considering the complex interactions of power, nature, and humanity. The film, in sum, offers a vision of reconciliation as a balance between mankind and nature as a condition for re-establishing an ecologically wholesome relationship in times of environmental crises.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Environmental Allegory, Nature-human Reconciliation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The film *Maleficent* (2014) by Robert Stromberg approaches the old story of *Sleeping Beauty* with a new perspective of who *Maleficent* is, a winged fairy who is the self-imposed protector of the Moors. This magical expanse showcases everything intertwined with balance and beauty about nature. With her wings taken from her after a bold betrayal by human ambition and greed personified by King Stefan, *Maleficent* turns from the once-kind guardian to a vengeful being. Her wings symbolized the freedom and the nature connection she advertised. She placed upon his only daughter, Aurora, the most dangerous curse. Eventually, she comes to have a sort of motherly affection for the girl and has to fight to undo the curse. If we read into this story a bit beyond what's present directly in the story itself, it looks as though *Maleficent's* character embodies the very raw side of nature, its resilience, and vulnerability, while King Stefan acts as a larger metaphor for human-driven exploitation, showing man's destructive nature while pursuing power and control over the environment.

The research investigates the relation between nature, power, and human effect through two given critical theories, Ecocriticism, and the Anthropocene. In that regard, the term ‘Anthropocene’ denotes human activity as a geological force that shapes the earth and influences ecosystems. Therefore, the manner in which the film articulates the destruction of nature by humans due to their greed and ambitions—creating pathos of power struggles pitting man against man as well as against nature—is, in the final analysis, what will be teased out in the narration and visual depictions in critical interaction among the characters in the film. This current research will do just that—highlight *Maleficent*’s narrative film and image as they develop a nuanced comment on implications resulting from environmental degradation and human interference in natural ecosystems.

The film *Maleficent* is a very forceful allegory about the perpetual conflict between nature and man’s exploitation, expressing the contemporary Anthropocene environmental problems through a story replete with themes of ecological destruction, power conflicts, and subsequent reconciliation. How the film treats Maleficent’s metamorphosis from nature’s guardian to vengeful antagonist back to the preacher of reconciliation between mankind and nature symbolizes larger questions of if and how humans can make their peace with the natural world, in the face of mounting ecological crisis. This paper will contribute to that strong current of ecocritical discourse by examining how popular media, such as *Maleficent*, gives expression to pertinent issues concerning ecological sustainability and human responsibility.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ecocriticism is a mode of theoretical discourse that looks into the interactions between literature, film, and the environment regarding how cultural productions reflect, represent, or challenge human conduct with nature. A late development, this approach came into being in the 1990s; environmental consciousness and growing alarm over ecological degradation laid its foundation. The following statement by Greg Garrard epitomizes the discourse: ecocriticism tries to answer questions about how literature, and sometimes other discourses like film, condition our concepts of environment, the ethical relations between human beings and the nonhuman, and the effects of human actions on ecosystems (Ecocriticism, 2nd edition, 2012).

Ecocriticism is concerned with the destruction of our environment, the unhealthy exploitation of resources and the intricate relationship between humans and non-human entities. Works created through ecocriticism usually depict aesthetically the nature, the human-induced ecological impact and finally the cultural thoughts that maintain or contradict ecocide. It frequently borders on anthropocentrism, a dominance of human wants and desires over other species, and proselytizes an eco-centric idea in which all life has value. In its review of fiction about the environment and man’s relation to it, ecocriticism broadens the readers’ understanding of human conduct that results in environmental changes and is reflected in titles like *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014), where methodologies and objectives of research are expounded upon. Its application is related to the discourses of today, such as the Anthropocene, climate change, and sustainability, through which literature and film serve as a lens for the examination of cultural responses towards these global challenges.

One of the aims of ecocriticism is to deal with the representations of human beings and nature, focusing on other cultural texts that describe the world to see the obvious impacts people have on the environment. Its major concern is the criticism of the abuse of natural resources by

man and his unsustainable practices that are deteriorating our environment. As pointed out by Greg Garrard (2012), ecocriticism scrutinizes the cultural imagination as complicit with or challenging human uses and representations of environments in a critique that may well be read as a call, again often urged to shift from anthro-to ecocentrism-were turn argues for intrinsic value in nature over its earlier human-centric appraisal of ecological well-being or become critical of market waters that predominantly speak of greens as a commodity" instead of frameworks which address the environment in responsible, sustainable ways. It brings out the viewpoint that discourses about nature are hardly innocent since they commonly serve to underwrite given ideological positions about human obligations towards the natural world.

A great many varieties of themes have been pursued in previous ecocritical studies concerning environmental doom, the war between man and nature, and nature's vengeance for maltreatment. Seminal ecocritical texts in the literary arena might include Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, which highlights the ecological destruction brought about by the use of pesticides and industrialization since its publication in 1962. What Carson did was to bring into clear vision the macabre interfacing of ecosystems and issue a warning against unchecked human actions that would lead to their destruction. For instance, in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), genetic engineering as well as the corporate exploitation of natural resources are damned in a dystopian projection into a future where environmental decompensation is the inescapable sequel to human avarice.

The ecocritical analysis has provided attention to both documentary and feature films in the film industry. In them, the global highlighting of climate change and man-made destruction of the environment came through documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* by Davis Guggenheim, released in 2006. In the views of scholars such as Timothy Clark (2015), such films challenge the viewers to question their entanglements with what is now often referred to as the 'Anthropocene' the current geological epoch defined by the influence of human beings on the planet's systems. Other ecocritical readings into commercial cinema are analyses of *Avatar* (2009), which studies the several negative impacts of colonialism and the extraction of resources from the planet Pandora and *Princess Mononoke* (1997), where an epic battle between industrialization and spiritual forces of nature is depicted.

Heise, Christiano, and Niemann in the *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014) noted how explicitly literature and film represent the destruction of the environment in what they call nature striking back. It usually does so through a catalog of such items as natural disasters and climate crises or the rebellion of non-human entities. The film *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and the novel he mentions by J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (1962), in which nature's revengeful response to over-exploitation by humans underlines the ecological costs of industrialization and resource depletion. Not only do these texts report such negative results of human behavior towards nature, but they also report speculative fantasies about the future that condition responses to and by the audience on different modes of relating to nature more sustainably.

Ecocriticism has now grown into a multiapproach discipline, asking the question of how culture constructs our perceptions of the environment. Works such as that of Ursula Heise in *Imagining Extinction* (2016) look at how portrayals of species' extinctions in literature and the media express human fears of environmental loss and their diminishing place in the new ecosystem. Ecocritical studies do work that serves to contest anthropocentrism, holding in recommendation the call for closer scrutiny on how stories of or about nature may be setting the tone for public discourse and policy on environmental conservation and justice.

The Anthropocene is the epoch geologists might define in the future with the benefit of hindsight; it would take note of the accelerating great acceleration of change in the earth's climate, biosphere, and lithosphere brought about by the activities of Homo sapiens. This would be signified by various chemical imprints on the environment — carbon emissions being just one set of fingerprints — plus deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution, to note a few (Crutzen, 2006; Steffen et al., 2011). Fundamental discussion material regarding human activity relating to environmental degradation and global ecocides, the term "Anthropocene" underscores one of the two words of its branding in pressing the salad fork of ethical consideration regarding human disruption of natural systems.

In the film *Maleficent* (2014), some key themes of the Anthropocene are visible in the depiction of environmental degradation resulting from human greed and a quest for power. The destruction that industrializing King Stefan does to the Moors, a pristine image of nature untouched, resembles the mundane ills resulting from real-world industrial ambitions to exploit natural resources. Forces of nature, such as Maleficent herself, protect the natural order from human intrusion, something portrayed in the challenges of the Anthropocene in environmental aspects.

The term Anthropocene helps to contextualize what the film is trying to say about the power dynamics between man and nature. King Stefan's dominance over the Moors is analogous to the dominance of man over nature, while Maleficent's resistance analogically discusses the restoration and balance potential of the inflicted-nature paradigm. This, in an extended level, makes one reflect about the equity of ethical responsibility in the sustenance of ecosystems and avoidance of environmental harm.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Ecocritical Analysis of *Maleficent* as a Reflection of Nature's Power

In *Maleficent* (2014), the titular character is introduced as a wild fairy at the center of nature, embodying everything the wilderness could be. Connecting her essence to the Moors in such a manner and presenting her powers as dependent on reality magic, Maleficent stands for free and vibrant nature at its best. Her character throughout the film is a multilayered metaphor for natural independence; the way she protects the Moors is a further symbol of an ecosystem being self-protected against any human intrusion, where it can exploit and take away its resources for its benefit. Maleficent and the Moors give human characteristics, getting even to the essence of wanting the audience to see nature as a real living being, with intrinsic value you can get nurturing and defense from.

From the start of *Maleficent*, the forest is depicted as an ideal, peaceful place where nature thrives under Maleficent's vigilant eye. The Moors act as a haven for nature's creatures, and Maleficent is its guardian—depicting an immense, intrinsic relationship between her character and the natural world. A sign of freedom and the connection to boundless energy within nature are Maleficent's wings, which permit her to fly up in the sky and over the forest. In the movie, Maleficent says at an early stage, "I had wings once. They were strong. They were stolen from me." (Stromberg, 2014, 00:15:23). Her loss symbolizes the greater exploitation of nature by human greed.

Maleficent's protective relationship with the Moors displays the view in ecology that nature is a system that can take care of itself without human intervention. According to ecocritics

like Clark (2015), the concept of nature being its entity, with autonomy, logic, and order is thoroughly developed in literature and film, and Maleficent's dominance over the Moors further illustrates such a notion. As the guardian of the Moors, she symbolizes a self-regulatory and self-defensive nature against extrinsic efforts. Against the background of the industrial, warlike human kingdom, the beauty, and life in the Moors point to an opposition between balanced ecological systems and the unilateral, hurtful drive of human ambition. Her power comes from the guardianship of nature, of the Moors- a metaphor for nature's power and independence. The fact that her magic respects control over elements and all kinds of creatures in the forest further establishes her as the personification of nature's self-supporting mechanism. This, in turn, maintains further echoes since the entire ecosystem she guards works interconnecting all lives. For instance, when King Stefan's men invaded the Moors, the trees and the animals came alive to fight them off. It portrayed that nature is autonomous and self-protecting, that it has a will of its own.

Viewed ecologically, the Moors are Earth's ecosystems, capable of control and self-repair if left undisturbed-restorative from the sins visited on them by humankind. This touches upon some concerns of environmental ethics since many variants of intrinsic value are subsumed by the notion of value for its own sake (Garrard, 2012). In her role as guardian, Maleficent stands for environmental justice, opposing the exploitation of the nonhuman natural world by humans for their ends. The figure of King Stefan may be taken as a symbol of conquest-and-colonialism destructive to nature, for exploitation, and as a source of power and material riches. King Stefan plundered the wings of Maleficent, a metonym for the act through which the autonomy of nature is shocked — one of the many examples of human activities, leading to irreparable losses to the ecosystems.

With her powers increasing, Maleficent puts the Moors under a protective enchantment that thornily walls away any invaders. This barrier suggests the theme of nature defending itself when violated; it further asserts the perception of the forest being a living entity, complete with its own mechanisms of survival. The movie supports Maleficent's attachment to the natural world by cinematically relating her magic with the earth. As she performs magic, the forest reacts to it: trees twist as though they have muscles, and the ground constitutes life by itself.

The Moors and its inhabitants add an anthropomorphic quality that further emphasizes the personification of nature in *Maleficent*. From the tree-like sentinels to the shapeshifting animals, all have been portrayed as sentient beings with agency, taking part actively in defending their home. These creatures are not merely passive elements belonging to the landscape; their function in the narrative is key since it symbolizes the active resistance of nature against exploitation by humans.

The forest itself is, in a way, a living breathing thing, valuable in and of itself, not just for human purposes. In environmental philosophy, it is a form of biocentrism, the view that all living things have intrinsic value, whether humans use them or not (Devall & Sessions, 1985). This kind of worldview, which is referred to as an independent Maleficent-protected environment, implies that earth exists in nature only for living. It does not portray nature as a resource intended for submission or trade by the hands of man, unlike the kingdom, where the perspective on nature is altogether contrasting.

Her close relationship with the forest is indeed synonymous with any ecofeminist reading of nature wherein female power and resilience underlie the ascription of natural world to female attributes (Plumwood, 1993). Her character poses a great challenge to patriarchal structures that King Stefan stands in personification with since he is a symbol of rule and power with an iron fist

over the ecosystem. From that perspective, being the guardian of the Moors equates Maleficent's character with ecofeminist criticism concerning the use of women and nature with patriarchal power systems. Just like Maleficent, the natural world is also given subjectivity, something that opposes both dominion and exploitation.

Visual metaphors are arranged in scenes of interaction between Maleficent and the landscape, maintaining a close connection with the Earth. For instance, when Maleficent strides through the forest, flowers spring up in the path she has taken, labeling her a life source or bringer within the system. This analogue harkens back to the ancient mythologies, wherein such forms of fertility and growth are attributed to the nature deities, further underlining Maleficent-as-nature in more general terms. Just as in nature, she hurts back; slowly turning from vengeful to reconciliatory, nature's healing and regenerative powers slowly mend hers along with its bruises.

In *Maleficent* (2014), the Moors act not only as a setting but also as a living, breathing character that embodies the film's motifs on nature, power, and balance. For one, the enchanted forest is equivalent to delineating a character by itself; it features the conflict between human encroachment and the world of nature, and its symbolism lies in its dual role as a place of sanctuary and battlefield where peace between man and nature is always being tested.

In most fiction, especially in the fantasy genre, the forest always surpasses the background. In *Maleficent*, living magical creatures populating the Moors affirm sentience and vitality in nature. The woods again function as an extension of Maleficent's powers; they will strike at a threat to protect themselves with magic. As Coates (2017) contends, "fantasy settings often elevate natural landscapes to the status of sentient beings, blurring the lines between nature and character" (p. 56). Most vivid is the Moors, where the notion of defense comes relatively actively from its tree guardians and numerous other cavalier magical beings.

In *Maleficent*, the forest's defense mechanisms put into relief the active role the Moors play within the narrative. Most evidently, this is visible through the tree guardians, which serve as the first line of defense. These creatures made entirely from the living elements of the forest point to nature's ability to protect itself. As Benton (2018) asserts, "fantasy environments often imbue the natural world with agency, where the landscape itself defends against threats, showing that nature is not passive but capable of resistance" (p. 119). In the movie, when King Stefan's soldiers try to hack their way into the Moors, the tree guardians come to life, uprooting themselves and using their bodies to stop the army from advancing. This scene captures the notion of nature striking back at human encroachment. The soldiers' weapons do not work on them; it is the element representing how nature cannot be tamed with brute force. Moreover, these guardians are parts of the essence of the Moors, which means from this, that the forest is not merely in the back but it is an active participant having its agency. "Nature is not simply an inert backdrop for human action, nor is it a force that can be mastered entirely. It possesses agency, sometimes pushing back against human interference in unpredictable ways" (Morton, 2016, p. 87). Moreover, the magical creatures of the Moors (fairy and other enchanted beings) play an important role in the balance of the forest and in being a fighter against any outside threat. Those creatures are too necessary for the strength of the forest. Just like bees or birds in an actual ecosystem. Their part ensures the dependence and protection of Moors that's how unified and tenuous nature balance shows stressful themes of peace with the humans as well as the environment.

Maleficent's function as a guardian of the Moors muddies the line between individual agency and environmental power. Her magic is in a deep relationship with the vitality of the forest, and through her, the Moors speak. When she raises the enchanted thorns barring around the forest

to stop King Stefan's army from invading, it is the forest raising the barrier. These thorns are not just tangible barriers but bear within them the reality of the wish of the Moors to not let them be touched by human greed. This act reasserts the selfness of the forest and its stance to not be conquered. The more Maleficent's powers grow, so do the Moors. Energy results from her mood; if she is happy, then the forest thrives, but if something is wrong with her, then the forest begins to wither. The energy therefore outlines an ultimate bond between human beings and the ecosystem whereby Maleficent, a human-fairy hybrid, stands in for what human actions can either make or break when it comes to dealing with nature. As stated in Dickerson and Evans (2006), "the green world archetype presents nature as both nurturing and destructive, reflecting humanity's relationship with the environment. Those who understand and respect its balance thrive; those who seek to dominate it ultimately fail" (p. 167)

Another indication that Maleficent is the protector of the Moors is when she uses her powers to bring the forest back to life after her emotional healing. As she is making peace with her past and with Aurora, the forest blossoms, showing vividly that flora-fauna cooperation is a cyclically moving — by its nature — phenomenon. What grows back in the Moors after cleanliness from something means the renewal that the humankind-nature balance holds. The bigger message behind what happens to the Moors in *Maleficent* is that this is how nature is, where it thrives in a balance and suffers otherwise. The conflict in the entirety of this movie keeps surfacing as the balance between humans and the natural world. Stefan's greedy and conquest-driven kingdom stands for industrialization and exploitation, while the Moors stand for maintaining nature's delicate balance. According to Goldstein (2019), "in many ecological narratives, forests are microcosms of Earth's ecosystems, reflecting through their endemic imbalances the broader implications of human action upon the environment" (p. 224).

The movie ends by asserting that this relationship between man and nature is not just desirable but also a condition for the former's survival. When the Moors are restored at the film's close and Maleficent heals the land, all the creatures then go back to their earlier peaceful state; it becomes a metaphor for what the cycle of ecological regeneration portrays: that no matter the destruction human beings do, there is a renewal potential in nature when given the chance.

3.2 Human Impact and the Anthropocene: Conflict and Exploitation

The Anthropocene is usually viewed as the period when considerable human effects on the Earth's ecosystems have been fully revealed; it is also deemed as one of the epochs of mere environmental destruction or exploitation. "The Anthropocene makes us aware that we have been profoundly involved in ecological processes for as long as humans have existed" (Morton, 2016, p. 48). In *Maleficent* (2014), this is seen through King Stefan's betrayal and stealing of Maleficent's wings, thus portraying man's exploitation of nature. The storyline acts as a metaphor for the actual deforestation, resource extraction, and degradation showing wider effects of human intrusion in natural ecosystems.

Maleficent is where a subtler metaphor lies. King Stefan's betrayal and theft of Maleficent's wings are subtler metaphors for human greed and ambition that lie behind the exploitation of natural resources. Stefan deceives Maleficent in a bid for power, stealing her wings to rise to the throne. This holds a mirror up to the real world of the abuse of nature in pursuit of personal ends, a metaphor for how natural resources have been brutally exploited to gain economic and political advantage. A more profound take on Maleficent's wings as a representation of more than just her power is that they stand for the life force of nature itself. As suggested by Jones (2018), "the theft

of Maleficent's wings can be seen as a metaphor for the capitalist drive to dominate and exploit the natural world for material wealth, disregarding the inherent value of nature" (p. 44). Stefan's betrayal stands for—much as industrial expansion leads to deforestation, mining, and all forms of environmental degradation—destructive results of human greed. Taking away Maleficent's wings is similar to extracting Earth's natural resources; it carries personal gain for the few and ecological imbalances for the many.

Stefan's betrayal reflects the forces of colonial and capitalist exploitation; for the enormous take-up of lands and resources since, it had been masked under progress and development. According to Pacheco (2020), the Anthropocene reflects this human propensity to dominate and re-engineer natural landscapes, often at the expense of incalculable long-term ecological harm. King Stefan's ascension to power after he took Maleficent's wings could be metaphorical to acts of colonial invasions and capitalist growth that give preference to immediate material profit over keeping nature in balance.

The expansion of Stefan's kingdom into the Moors has real-world parallels with Anthropocene deforestation and land use change. In the movie, after the theft, the Moors change color, losing life and light to become dark and menacing, in a metaphor for the way human action results in ecological collapse. This degradation, visible in the film, speaks for the severest impacts of the Anthropocene, such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change. In the same way that global industrial development is encroaching upon the domain of the Moors to reach Stefan's kingdom, forested areas are now globally being razed to open space for urbanization, agriculture, and resource extraction in most cases with calamitous ecological effects.

The storytelling reveals the aftereffects of human exploitation of nature, starting with the case of Maleficent's revenge following the theft of her wings. In return for Stefan's treachery, Maleficent puts a curse on his daughter, Aurora, to fall into eternal sleep. The very ill that humans have their hands in causing the environment can therefore be held tantamount to this curse cast upon nature's retribution for the actions of humans disrupting the natural order of ecosystems. According to Schindler (2019), the curse laid upon Stefan's daughter is analogous to the side effects caused unintentionally by environmental abuse, venturing into other related, adverse effects to show how interference with nature leads to bad consequences.

Here, Maleficent's curse would be nature's way of replying to human greed and exploitation. This whirls into real ecologic outcomes in the Anthropocene: climate change, species dying out, the ecosystem falling apart, given all as effects of human actions resulting from their curse, just like it had unforeseen devastating effects in the human kingdom. In similar ways, in real life human actions have degraded natural systems on this planet. Whether it is the rising global temperatures or the loss of biodiversity, these outcomes speak of the unchecked force of human activity. It therefore articulates how human intervention disrupts from there on down to collapse the natural order and he makes a pretty strong case. For example, the expansion of the kingdom into the Moors is embarking on a wide scale of deforestation, where the magical creatures of the forest die out. This small destruction is synonymous with the real effects of industrialization aspects since they clear the forests among other ecosystems, hence leading to the extinction of the wildlife and natural habitats that had existed. As postulated by Lovelock (2018), the Anthropocene represents a time in which human activity has pushed the Earth's systems to the brink, resulting in an era of ecological collapse and climate instability.

This curse connects to wider themes in The Anthropocene through its lifting only when Maleficent and Princess Aurora forgive each other, and the kingdom actively works to heal the

breach between nature and humanity. This showcases a potential restorative arc between mankind once they learn to respect and live in harmony with the earth. The movie strongly implies that no matter how grievous the effects of human abuse are, healing is very possible though hard but achievable by setting right the wrongs humanity does and thus making sure there is a favorable equilibrium in the ecology.

3.3 The Interplay of Power and Reconciliation

The conflict of powers between humanity and the natural world in *Maleficent* (2014) is reflective of something much larger that has to do with the 'Anthropocene,' wherein hegemony is brought to bear by the human species over the earth's ecosystem. King Stefan, in a sense, stood for ambition and cruelty within humanity, while Maleficent personified the natural world and its self-defense mechanism against brutality. Eventually, gradually as the narrative goes by, the feud-attract between these two forces evolves into a love-hate relationship as a metaphor for the potential of humankind making amends with nature and embracing sustainability.

It also largely gives a sense of battle for central *Maleficent*; Stefan and Maleficent greatly stand for a grander clash of the Anthropocene between mankind's thrust for dominance and nature's backlash of exploitation. This act of betrayal on the part of King Stefan towards Maleficent—mutilating her wings to appease the human king and assure his ascension to the throne—can be symbolized as an instance of the way humanity exploits natural resources for self-gain. As Benton (2019) sums up well the stealing of Maleficent's wings is emblematic of human ambition's destructiveness in the Anthropocene, where natural resources are ravaged with no consideration of the ecological aftermath. This is where Stefan's deeds illustrate the historical and continual exploitation of nature based on capitalistic and colonizer standards that essentially define the Anthropocene through industrial growth, deforestation, and extracting resources.

Nature in the guise of *Maleficent* is not willing to take everything quietly, it is her way of responding with anger and revenge, much similar to the reaction in its vibrancy to the human destruction of the environment. When Maleficent cursed Aurora, Stefan's daughter, she was taking out her revenge on the harm that was afflicted on her and the Moors—on the enchanted forest that she protected. Again, this act of vengeance is highly analogous to the way the 'natural world' has also been understood to 'fight back' against human encroachment—evoking such phenomena as climate change, natural disasters, or the collapse of ecosystems. This in turn relates to Schindler (2018) states that Maleficent's curse symbolic reflection of nature's retribution against human hubris, illustrates a corollary of the broader ecological tenet, that actions to the environment have rippling consequences.

Though the movie opens with a clash, it finally progresses into a reconciliation, giving hope for the relationship between human and nature. The arc of Reconciliation can be explained through the shifting relationship between Maleficent and Aurora. Initially, the curse that Maleficent imposes on Aurora is an ultimate reflection of the anger toward mankind's treachery. As she later grows fond of the child, the same curse comes to represent the potential for nature to forgive and heal. Humanity's representative, Aurora, is poised to unlock the return of a harmonic bond between the human and the natural world. According to Bailey (2020), the relationship between Maleficent and Aurora symbolizes the possibility of reconciliation between humans and nature, suggesting that coexistence and balance are achievable. "Ecological thought compels us to rethink balance—not as a static condition, but as something dynamic, constantly negotiated

through interactions" (Morton, 2016, p. 59). The film relationship between Maleficent and Aurora at this film progresses is a development towards positive coexistence ecologically. It is not a marked harmonious perfect relationship but the gradual acknowledgment of their linked lives. The maternal bond of Maleficent with Aurora reflects an insight into the labyrinthine twists of life— both that of humans and nonhumans— where care, protection, and balance are exalted. As the key bearer of humanity, her office in restoring the Moors brings to the limelight the deep links between humans and nature: Ecological hope can only be restored by tending together in reciprocity and mutual care."Ecological coexistence isn't about perfect harmony, but rather about understanding the complex, messy entanglements between all beings, human and nonhuman alike" (Morton, 2016, p. 124).

"Ecocriticism not only critiques environmental destruction but also highlights possibilities for regeneration and restoration, emphasizing that ecosystems can recover if human intervention is tempered by care and respect" (Heise, Christiano, & Niemann, 2014, p. 311). This is shown at the movie's end, when Maleficent and Aurora work together to overpower King Stefan and repair the breach done to the Moors, an ideal of ecological concord is expressed in this film. In this unity, hence, clear sustainable human-nature relations can be maintained if humanity will respect and endorse the natural world rather than life use it restoration of life in the Moors after Stefan is vanquished drives the theme that nature can be renewed, but mankind has to change their exploitative ways. Like the viewpoint expressed by Carrington (2021) is that the film provides a vision of hope for remedying the ills of the Anthropocene by proposing that, to learn to live in harmony with their environment, mankind must focus on nurturing, not dominating, nature.

3.4 The Role of Gender in the Ecocritical Context

This extends to the title character in *Maleficent* (2014) as at once dominant and nurturing and reflects the common trope concerning the feminization of nature in popular media: long-standing associations between women and the Earth produce the natural world as feminine. Thus blurred by Maleficent— who is both protector of the Moors (the enchanted forest) and a part of it, blurring human/natural lines in character— the broader cultural trend into which Maleficent fits genderizes nature as female, emphasizing not only its power to nurture but also its power to nurture and resist.

Her strength lies in the protective care for the Moors, portraying her as the embodiment of nature itself. Ecofeminists have worked on this connection of women with nature; they argue that there is a close link between male chauvinism with its patriarchal set-up that keeps men above women, the suppression of women, and the exploitation of the environment. It has a basic patriarchal framework of masculinists to impose their control and use of women and natural resources to gain economically and politically from it. As Shiva (1988) observes, the feminization of nature derives from a patriarchal paradigm, which aims to exploit not only women but also the natural world for their economic and political interests. In the movie *Maleficent*, King Stefan's act of cutting off Maleficent's wings can be taken as a similar act of patriarchal supremacy- over a powerful woman and over the natural world she stands in for.

The movie presents the character of Maleficent as a response to patriarchal exploitation, hence reflecting both the power of nurturance and that of destruction. When Stefan does the same against her, what Maleficent resuscitates in response is anger and vengeance— the look of consequences of any attempt to dominate nature being fatal. As put forward by Benton (2020), Maleficent's change from a nurturing guardian to the vengeful force of nature demonstrates that

patriarchal regimes of power incite a violent reaction from nature. Here the dual exploitation of gender and environment shows that women, like nature, are under control and oppression within the patriarchal system, but also there is the possibility of resistance to this control.

The return of Maleficent to her nurturing role further exposes that the feminization of nature is a double-edged process wherein the Earth is generously giving life and, at the same time, could be destructive if pushed beyond its limit. The movie criticizes the patriarchal ideology based on the perception that nature (and females) can perpetually be ill-treated without reacting back. It therefore has *Maleficent* show how such ill-treatment leads to an environmental as well as personal disaster. This coincides with ecofeminist criticisms about a patriarchal rule, in which the being down of women and nature is mutual, having collective potential for substantial pushback.

3.4.1 Motherhood as a Link to the Earth

The maternal affection that Maleficent develops for Aurora is a metaphor for what nurturing and sustaining life is. Maleficent originally places a curse on Aurora as a vengeful strike against King Stefan but grows to love the child as she watches it grow, replacing hate with love. Thus, motherhood is a transformation that is qualified by the relationship with the Earth; in this light, Maleficent stands for the natural nurturing aspect. The relationship between Maleficent and Aurora symbolizes how the Earth gives life and maintains it by feeding all its living creatures despite inflicting pain.

An analogy in the film can be found in the relationship between Maleficent and Aurora, who need to protect the natural world for future generations. Just like Maleficent warms up to Aurora and acknowledges the role of protection's importance, humanity should come to terms with nurturing and taking care of the Earth because of the successors. According to Warren (1996), the maternal bond within ecofeminism as well is the symbol powerful symbol whereby interconnectedness among everything living and the urge to conserve the ecosystems of the Earth for posterity comes out strongly. The increasing affection Maleficent feels for Aurora reemphasizes this as she morphs from the vengeful figure into a custodian and protector resembling nature acting as the life-nourishing source. The movie brings out the concept that motherhood and taking care of the planet are two sisterly tasks. As a mother figure, Maleficent does not only define these roles regarding her relationship with Aurora but also generally as a protector of the Moors. Apart from taking care of Aurora, her endeavors towards healing and bringing back the Moors to normal after their destruction by Stefan's betrayal run side by side. This twin contribution brings out the aspect that safeguarding the flora and fauna is inherently related to life protection, both being indispensable for the health of future generations.

The ending of the movie, in which Maleficent and Aurora make peace and clean up the Moors, represents a vision of ecological balance and harmony. This is in line with ecofeminist views in the belief that a maternal bond with the Earth can work toward humanity living in harmony with nature rather than exploiting it for short-term gain Carrington (2021) states that nurturing the Earth in ecofeminist stories through maternal bonding promotes a future-oriented developmental notion of sustainability and environmental stewardship. Most of all, the fact that Maleficent changes from an avenging party to a protective carer serves as a visionary hope for the future relationship between humanity and the Earth.

3.5 Cultural and Environmental Implications in the Anthropocene

Maleficent (2014) is an allegory of the environment, potent for the 21st century, resonating with the fears of contemporary climate change, species extinction, and deforestation. The Enchanted Moors in the film, portrayed as a bright, fragile ecosystem bear resemblance with real anxieties towards degradation. Referring to the Moors as having life, it shows the urgency, like in reality, that the ecosystem has to be safeguarded and, in return, reflects, as per the film, that nature is an entity that everything is dependent on.

Should Stefan's betraying *Maleficent* cause deforestation and destruction in the Moors? This is perhaps one of the grandest metaphors that best define the environment in the film. Stretching into the Moors with the borders of Stefan's kingdom, the landscape he once teemed magic and lightness with changes to reflect a dark, dangerous environment. "Human exploitation of the natural world is frequently justified through narratives of progress and development, but ecocritical analysis reveals the catastrophic environmental consequences of unchecked industrialization and resource extraction" (Heise, Christiano, & Niemann, 2014, p. 122). Just as expanding urbanization and industrialization result in deforestation and habitat loss, the principal causes of species loss in the age of humankind. According to Benton (2019), the degradation of the moors is a visual allegory for the implications concerning human intrusions on the natural habitats and indicates a very fine balance that should exist between development and ecological preservation. Fear that unlimited industrialization will destroy nature-bound systems draws a perfectly painted picture of how the Moors turn, first barren and then menacing.

In addition, the movie *Maleficent* raises the theme of species extinction through its story of magical creatures living in the Moors. These creatures whose multidimensional biodiversity in the natural world represents are actually treated by the impetus for the growth of King Stefan's kingdom. The text of the film is a metaphor for the present extinction crisis when human activities lead to the vanishing of uncountable species through deforestation, pollution, climate change, and so forth. For example, as noted by Carrington (2021), consequently vulnerable magical creatures of the Moors may be regarded as biodiversity symbols of Earth, their plight reflective of the world, undertaking many species.

The climax where *Maleficent* and Aurora cooperate to heal the Moors is a metaphorical shout to restoration and conservation. That very moment speaks to the potential of humans to restore some of the damages done to the environment—to imbibe sustainable living practices. As noted by Schindler (2020), the restoration of the Moors at the film's conclusion represents the possibility of environmental renewal, reflecting contemporary calls for ecological conservation and sustainable living. This way, *Maleficent* stands for most environmental movements—focusing on the restoration and protection of ecosystems, especially in the bold of climatic changes and biodiversity loss.

Maleficent is a retelling of fairy tales through an environmental frame; it proposes 'nature' as a protagonist rather than a passive, ornamental backdrop in most traditional stories in which, 'nature,' showcases human action but in no way participates in those actions. Traditional tales typically depict actions taken on or within nature's space rather than nature acting as an express character within the story. *Maleficent*, however, brings forth the Moors into the storyline—that is, Nature as a character, with a voice and an ability to provide for and defend itself. This shift in where eco-sensitivity lies within the cultural narrative is a reflection of modern times with the environment front and center in the global conversation. Given the fact that in the movie the Moors are depicted as a quasi-sentient and self-sustaining ecosystem, the movie is in accord with deep

ecology, which says there are grounds for believing in respecting nature for itself, apart from all considerations of the benefits it may present to humans. According to Morton (2016), modern cinema, particularly fantasy and science fiction, has begun to incorporate ecological themes more explicitly, often portraying nature as a force that must be respected and protected, rather than conquered. *Maleficent* falls into line with these by providing the image of nature as an intricate self-willed thing helpless against increasing domination and exploitation by humans.

Indeed, *Maleficent* embodies the two features of nature: both the nurturing aspect of nature—noble and protective—and the retaliatory aspect of nature when provoked. The character of *Maleficent* undergoes an arc from being the protector of the Moors to becoming a force of vengeance and then reverting to being a protector. This is essentially reflective of the larger environmental narrative of destruction followed by restoration. According to Bailey (2018), The character arc of *Maleficent* reflects the tension between the exploitation of nature and reconciliation, a conversation surrounding sustainable relationships with the environment at large. At the broader level of meaning, the vulnerability and resilience of nature are described by the film as such that humanity has a responsibility to its multifaceted nature, especially during the Anthropocene, wherein the 'age of the human' gets its due attention.

Maleficent is also a contribution to the discourse on cultural environmental justice. The film is a scathing response to the patriarchal, capitalist society that forms the bulwark of environmental degradation; it damns this society as unsustainable. Indeed, King Stefan's pursuit of power at a very palpable cost to the Moors and *Maleficent* acts as a metonym for the destructive forces of industrial capitalism and colonialism, which for centuries have ravaged both the natural world and the most vulnerable elements of its human population. This is something expected in the environmental justice movement, designed to challenge inequalities flowing from environmental exploitation, as highlighted by climate change and depletion (Martinez-Alier, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

The movie *Maleficent* (2014) is a querying modern ecological allegory due to its very complicated representation of the people and nature relationship. The view focuses on ecocriticism and ecofeminism analysis of the movie, detecting deforestation, extinction of the species, and more significant results of human action in the era of the Anthropocene. In general, *Maleficent* is a strong statement regarding mankind's exploitation of nature that is depicted in King Stefan's betrayal and subsequent destruction of the Moors. This, however, is hopeful, together with the hopeful note that comes out from the movie, between 'man' and 'the natural world', a possible re-establishing of balance and respect.

The character *Maleficent* embodies this dual notion of nature, be it nurturing yet destructive. When she at first played the role of guardian to the Moors, she represented natural autonomy, balance, and the ability to prosper without the interference of man. When King Stefan betrayed her by stealing her wings—, a metaphor for how mankind takes from nature— she then turned into a vengeful force, a reflection of how nature strikes back when pushed too far. It is this transformation that is parallel to the real-life environmental issues due to human greed and rapid industrialization growing out of proportion, giving rise to climate changes and loss of biodiversity.

Another ecofeminist theme drawn in the movie makes *Maleficent's* story not only an environmental metaphor but also a criticism of patriarchal structures. Just like King Stefan

dominates Maleficent, women, and nature at large are usually exploited under the dominion of patriarchal and capitalist systems. Her wings are forcibly taken from her— symbolizing freedom and a natural tie— just as women and nature oftentimes have to be commodified and aggrieved to serve powerful males and industries. This critique is central to ecofeminist thinking about the relatedness of women’s suppression and the ruination of the environment.

Though much of the film focuses on presenting environmental ruin and human folly, after all, *Maleficent* does posit healing and restoration as possibilities. What has happened with Maleficent and Aurora has shifted from one of vengeance to one of parenting and stands for the possibility that people can come to acknowledge and care for the natural world to hand it down to their children. The relation between Maleficent (nature) and Aurora (humanity) thus holds reconciliation as a possibility when, by accepting their mutual dependence on nature, humans begin behaving respectfully and responsibly towards the environment.

The end of the movie, where the Moors are returned to their original splendor, just goes to prove that there is a renewing quality in nature. Only with human beings, this endowed purity is achieved through Aurora, working to not abuse and harm nature but instead work harmoniously with it to get that ideal ecological balance and sustainability. In a larger aspect, this is what current environmental movements are promoting and encouraging humans to do by living a sustainable life, conserving ecology, and reassessing human relations with nature.

In sum, *Maleficent* speaks very directly as an allegory about the environmental challenges of the Anthropocene. The story of exploitation, then enmity, eventually coming to terms in the movie is tantamount to humanity rethinking its effects on the environment. It flays those patriarchal, capitalist forces that bring in the degradation with a hopeful vision of the future of a biosphere system and parity reigning with that criticism. Classic fairy tales get rewritten through an ecological lens to continue modern cultural discourse concerning environmental justice and sustainability, among other distinctly hot themes, and the responsibilities human might have in response to the increasingly critical biosphere.

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