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REPRESENTATION OF PATRIARCHY IN THE MOVIE CATHERINE CALLED BIRDY (2022) BY LENA DUNHAM

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of patriarchy and how the main character resists it in the film Catherine Called Birdy (2022), directed by Lena Dunham. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. The participant is the main character, Birdy, whose experiences of patriarchy and resistance form the central focus of the analysis. Data were collected through repeated viewing of the film, followed by identification and classification of relevant dialogues and cinematographic elements. The data were then analyzed using Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy from Sexual Politics (1970). The results show that patriarchy in the film operates through the authority of the father figure, who controls the body, decisions, and future of the main character. Women in the film are positioned as subordinate, treated as property, and expected to obey male authority. However, the study also finds that the main character actively resists this system through deliberate actions such as hiding signs of adulthood, refusing suitors, and behaving outside the standards expected of her. This study concludes that patriarchy is not a natural system but a social construct that can be recognized and challenged, and that Millett's theory remains a relevant framework for analyzing gender power dynamics in contemporary film. This study contributes to the field of gender studies and film analysis by demonstrating that Millett's (1970) theory of patriarchy remains a relevant and effective framework for reading gender power dynamics in contemporary cinema, and by showing that resistance can emerge from positions of powerlessness through everyday acts of deliberate defiance.

Keywords: *female subordination, film analysis, patriarchy, resistance, Sexual Politics.*



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Introduction

Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold dominant power and authority over women in various aspects of life. According to Millett (1970), patriarchy operates across multiple institutions, including politics, education, industry, and the family, giving men greater opportunities to control decisions and maintain dominant positions in society. Within the family, this control is particularly visible. Fathers are often positioned as the primary authority who determine important decisions for wives and children, including matters related to education, daily activities, finances, and marriage. Millett (1970) argues that the family is the core institution of patriarchy because it is where patriarchal values are first introduced and passed down from one generation to the next. This view aligns with Beauvoir's (1949) argument that women's subordination is not a natural condition but a socially constructed one, maintained through institutions such as the family. Through family socialization, children learn gender roles that define appropriate behaviors and expectations for men and women, with women consistently placed in subordinate positions.

The pervasiveness of patriarchal structures across history and cultures has also made cinema a powerful medium for representing and critiquing gender power dynamics in society. Filmmakers use visual and narrative tools to explore how women navigate systems that restrict their autonomy (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). To analyze such representations, this study draws on both literary and cinematic frameworks. Abrams and Harpham (2015) define theme as the central idea or message conveyed in a literary work, connected to human experience, which helps readers and viewers understand the deeper meaning of a story. Abrams and Harpham (2015) further explain that characters are individuals depicted in a dramatic or narrative work who possess moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities revealed through their dialogue and actions. Characters may be classified as either flat characters, who can be summarized in a single phrase due to limited individual detail, or round characters, who possess complex temperaments and motivations that more closely reflect the nuances of real human nature. To examine how these characters are constructed, Raeske (1996) offers six methods of analyzing characterization: studying a character's physical appearance, examining their speech through asides and soliloquies to uncover desires, observing dialogue between characters,

considering hidden narratives such as the thoughts of other characters or narrators, analyzing the language used by characters, and evaluating their actions alongside the motivations behind them.

Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy, as developed in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing gender power in both real and fictional contexts. Scott (1986) similarly argued that gender is a primary field through which power relations are signified and structured, making it essential to examine how gender hierarchies are constructed and maintained within cultural texts such as film. Millett (1970) explains that patriarchy grants the father nearly total ownership over his wife and children, including the power of physical discipline and the authority to make decisions about their futures, including marriage. This system is not natural but is a social construct created and maintained through cultural norms, family structures, and institutional practices. Because patriarchy is socially constructed, Millett (1970) argues that it can also be dismantled when people, especially women, recognize how it controls them and take action to resist it. Lerner (1986) similarly notes that patriarchal control that begins in the family gradually extends to wider social institutions, sustaining male dominance across generations.

Several studies have applied Millett's framework to analyze patriarchy in film. Khofifah (2025) examined the representation of female leadership and resistance against patriarchy in *The Super Mario Bros* (2023) and found that Princess Peach challenges traditional patriarchal roles through her courage and intelligence. Kamila (2024) analyzed *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) and found that patriarchal culture limits women's access to education and employment while also depicting women's efforts to resist through building careers and self-confidence. Layali (2022) applied Sylvia Walby's (1990) theory to a novel and identified four patriarchal structures, including household production relations, patriarchal culture, male violence, and patriarchal relations in sexuality. While these studies contribute to the understanding of patriarchy in film and literature, they tend to focus on either the representation or the resistance separately, without examining how both interact to show the full complexity of a woman's experience under patriarchal control.

This study addresses that gap by providing an integrated analysis of both patriarchal representation and female resistance in *Lena Dunham's Catherine Called Birdy* (2022), a film based on Karen Cushman's 1994 novel set in medieval England. The film follows Birdy, a young girl whose father controls her life and plans to marry her off to a wealthy man. The film was chosen because it powerfully depicts how patriarchy operates within the

family through dialogue and cinematographic elements, while also showing a character who actively and creatively resists that control. By examining both patriarchy and resistance in the same analysis, this study offers a more complete picture of how gender power dynamics are represented in contemporary film. Two research questions guide the study: (1) How is patriarchy represented in Catherine Called Birdy (2022) by Lena Dunham? and (2) How does the main character resist patriarchy in Catherine Called Birdy (2022) by Lena Dunham?

Research Methods

Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the representation of patriarchy and the main character's resistance in Catherine Called Birdy (2022) (Moleong, 2017). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), qualitative research is used to investigate and understand the meanings that individuals or groups give to social or human issues. This approach is suitable for this study because it focuses on interpreting the social meanings embedded in the film's dialogue and visual elements rather than measuring quantifiable data. Kate Millett's (1970) theory of patriarchy from Sexual Politics serves as the primary analytical framework, guiding the identification and interpretation of patriarchal practices and acts of resistance throughout the film.

Participants

The participant in this study is the main character, Birdy, in the film Catherine Called Birdy (2022) directed by Lena Dunham. Birdy is a young girl living in medieval England whose experiences of patriarchal control and resistance form the central focus of the analysis. The film itself serves as the primary source of data, providing a narrative through which patriarchal practices and the characters' responses are depicted. This study does not involve real human participants in the traditional sense; instead, it uses film analysis to interpret how patriarchy and resistance are portrayed through the characters' dialogue, actions, and the cinematographic elements used in each scene.

Instrument

The primary instrument in this study is an observation sheet developed by the researchers to guide the systematic collection and recording of data from the film. The observation sheet is structured around two analytical dimensions derived from Millett's (1970) theory of patriarchy:

(1) evidence of patriarchal control, including biological, social, and economic dimensions as exercised over the main character; and (2) evidence of female resistance, including deliberate acts through which the main character challenges that control. For each selected scene, the observation sheet records the relevant dialogue or cinematographic element, identifies the form of patriarchy or resistance present, and maps it to the corresponding theoretical category. The data source for this study is the film *Catherine Called Birdy* (2022), directed by Lena Dunham. The dialogues and cinematographic elements within the film serve as the material from which data are drawn and analyzed. The technical interpretation of cinematographic elements is guided by Brown's (2016) framework for camera shots and angles, Petrie and Boggs's (2012) discussion of film viewing techniques and shot composition, and Pratista's (2008) framework for understanding *mise-en-scène*, all of which provide the basis for reading how visual elements are used to represent patriarchy and resistance in each scene.

Data Collection

The researcher used the following steps to collect data. First, the film *Catherine Called Birdy* (2022), directed by Lena Dunham, was watched repeatedly and carefully to gain a thorough understanding of the storyline and characters. Second, the dialogues and cinematographic elements that depicted patriarchy and resistance were identified. Third, the relevant scenes and dialogues were marked and noted for accuracy in data collection. Fourth, the data were classified into two main categories based on Millett's (1970) theory: scenes that show the representation of patriarchy, and scenes that show the main character's resistance to patriarchy.

Data analysis

In the data analysis stage, the dialogues and cinematographic elements from *Catherine Called Birdy* (2022) were examined and interpreted using Millett's (1970) theory of patriarchy. The analysis was conducted in several steps: first, the relevant dialogues and scenes were identified; second, the data were analyzed to reveal patterns of patriarchal representation and resistance as described by Millett (1970); and finally, the findings were interpreted to conclude how patriarchy is represented and how the main character copes with it throughout the film.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this study are divided into two parts. First, the study explores how patriarchy is represented in *Catherine Called*

Birdy (2022), directed by Lena Dunham, drawing on Millett's (1970) theory of patriarchy. Second, the study discusses how the main character, Birdy, resists patriarchy throughout the film.

Results

The representation of patriarchy in Catherine Called Birdy (2022)

The representation of patriarchy in Catherine Called Birdy (2022) is shown through the authority and control exercised by male figures, particularly within the family. Patriarchal practices are rooted in the father's authority, where the main character is expected to obey rules, follow traditional gender roles, and accept decisions about her future, especially marriage. These expectations limit her independence and shape her role as a woman within the family and society. Based on this portrayal, several forms of patriarchal representation experienced by the main character are identified through dialogues and cinematographic elements in the film.

The first scene shows the patriarchal expectation placed on Birdy's body when her nanny, Morwenna, reacts to Birdy's first menstruation. This is seen in the dialogue: *"So, you will do your duty to bear your husband children."* (Dunham, 2022, 00:09:58). Morwenna's statement shows how a woman's body is used by the patriarchal system to define her purpose in life. Menstruation is treated not as a private physical event but as a social signal that Birdy is now ready to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother. According to Millett (1970), the family is the primary patriarchal institution responsible for instilling gender roles from one generation to the next. The scene uses a long shot and eye-level angle, with brighter lighting on Birdy and darker lighting on Morwenna, showing Birdy's innocence against the weight of patriarchal norms being imposed on her. This scene demonstrates that patriarchy exists not only through male dominance but also through women who normalize and pass down patriarchal expectations within the family.

The second scene shows direct physical violence as a tool of patriarchal control. Lord Rollo strikes Birdy after she chases away a wealthy suitor. This is seen in the dialogue: *"You will behave like a lady when the suitors come, or we will all be living in the cooper's cellar. Do you understand me?!"* (Dunham, 2022, 00:28:40). This dialogue shows that Lord Rollo's anger is not only about Birdy's disobedience but also about the financial consequences her behavior causes. Birdy's body and decisions are treated as economic resources that belong to her father. The scene uses a medium shot on Lord Rollo's side to emphasize his dominant position and an over-the-shoulder shot on Birdy's side to show that she has no control over her own life. The dimly lit room reflects the family's poverty, while the brighter

lighting on Lord Rollo signifies his authority. Millett (1970) explains that patriarchy grants fathers authority to use physical violence to enforce the compliance of their wives and children, treating women as property that can be punished for disobedience.

The third scene shows that physical violence against women is so common under patriarchy that it becomes part of normal conversation. Birdy discusses being beaten with her friend Aelis. This is seen in the dialogue: *"You get whipped? My father only beats me across the hand."* (Dunham, 2022, 00:33:16). The casual tone in which Birdy compares her father's punishment with the whipping Aelis receives shows how normalized violence has become in their lives. Neither girl reacts with shock because they have been raised in a system where a father's right to punish is considered natural. The scene uses an eye-level angle to show that violence is presented as a normal part of social life. A medium shot on Aelis's side shows her limitations as a woman who must submit to patriarchal rules, while a medium close-up on Birdy's side shows her casual expression in speaking about violence. The brown tree trunk in the background represents the patriarchal system that stands behind them, solid and unshakeable. This aligns with Millett's (1970) theory that patriarchy positions fathers as if they own their wives and children, including the right to use physical violence to enforce compliance.

The fourth scene shows that even the mother figure is powerless under patriarchy and can no longer protect her daughter. Lady Aislinn informs Birdy that her father found the monthly rags she had been hiding. This is seen in the dialogue: *"Now, I've been trying my best to protect you, but your father is waiting for his chance to make you a wife, and to bring propriety to this manor, and I can deny him no more."* (Dunham, 2022, 00:37:46). Lady Aislinn's words reveal that she has been trying to shield Birdy but can no longer do so because her own authority is subordinate to Lord Rollo's. This shows that even women who care for their daughters are ultimately unable to override male authority within the patriarchal system. The scene uses an eye-level angle and a medium long shot to show Lady Aislinn and Birdy together, emphasizing that neither can refuse Lord Rollo's decision. Morwenna is shown in a long shot in the background, indicating she is also trapped in the same structure. The old wooden furniture and dark walls signify the rigidity of the patriarchal system they live under. This aligns with Millett's (1970) theory that patriarchal culture is supported by all members of the family and passed down to ensure compliance with established gender roles.

The fifth scene shows how patriarchal control extends to Birdy's body being prepared for male approval. Birdy is forced to bathe before suitors

arrive to assess her. This is seen in the dialogue: "*Your father told me to scrub every cranny of you before the guests arrive.*" (Dunham, 2022, 00:38:53). This scene shows that Birdy's body is treated as an object that must be cleaned and presented to satisfy the standards of the men who come to choose her. She is not consulted or asked for consent. The scene uses a long shot and eye-level angle, with Birdy appearing trapped in a bathtub, reflecting her powerlessness in a male-dominated environment. The bathtub symbolizes social constraints that determine a woman's worth through obedience, while Morwenna's compliance reflects how patriarchy conditions women to accept and enforce rules on others. The lighting coming from two windows creates a contrast between the hope of freedom and the reality of patriarchal pressure surrounding Birdy. This aligns with Millett's (1970) theory that patriarchy operates through men who treat women as property, with fathers holding the right to control and display their daughters for male benefit.

The sixth scene shows how Birdy's behavior is controlled to represent the family's honor in society. Lord Rollo scolds Birdy in front of the man she is being made to marry. This is seen in the dialogue: "*Catherine! You might attempt to set a good example to our tenants and to our villagers ... to show them what a lady might be instead of subjecting us to all the shame! Humiliation!*" (Dunham, 2022, 00:49:16). Lord Rollo's demand that Birdy be a role model for the community demonstrates that her body and behavior are used to represent the family's morals. When she acts outside the expected norm, the entire family is considered shameful. Women are therefore forced to carry the burden of family honor in a way that ultimately serves the interests of men. The scene uses a medium close-up shot and low angle on Lord Rollo's side to emphasize his dominant position and emotional power over Birdy, while dim yellow lighting creates a depressing atmosphere reflecting Birdy's fear under her father's control. This aligns with Millett's (1970) theory that women are treated as property whose bodies and behaviors are used for men's benefit, and that women are expected to fulfill idealized feminine roles that do not challenge male authority.

The seventh scene shows how Lord Rollo dismisses Birdy's right to make decisions about her own marriage. This is seen in the dialogue: "*I am your father, and if I say you shall be married, then married you shall be.*" (Dunham, 2022, 00:50:31). Lord Rollo's statement makes it clear that Birdy has no voice in decisions about her own life. He does not ask, negotiate, or consider her feelings. The decision to marry is presented as his right, not a matter for discussion. The scene uses a medium close-up shot and eye-level angle to capture both characters' expressions, with dim lighting on Birdy's side obscured by stone, indicating that she is not free to make her own choices. The darker light on Lord Rollo's side represents the authority he

holds over her. Millett (1970) explains that patriarchy grants the father nearly total ownership over his family, making male dominance appear natural and unquestionable within the family structure.

The eighth scene shows Birdy being treated as an object whose status as a future wife has already been decided without her knowledge or consent. Lord Rollo presents her to a wealthy man as though the matter is already settled. This is seen in the dialogue: *"My lady of Lithgow. Your bridegroom awaits you, and none of your tricks will profit you this time, you've reached the end of the charade and you will move forward and out."* (Dunham, 2022, 01:00:36). Birdy is addressed as *"lady of Lithgow"* as though her status as a wife has already been established without her input, and any resistance is dismissed as a trick. The scene uses a medium close-up and eye-level angle to clearly show Birdy's uncomfortable expression, which is ignored by everyone at the table. The dark background depicts the limitations and oppression women experience under patriarchy. The natural light from the window behind Birdy represents hope and freedom, but her position with her back to the light suggests that her circumstances prevent her from reaching it. This aligns with Millett (1970), who explains that patriarchy gives fathers almost total power over wives and children, rendering women as family property to be controlled and arranged in marriage for male gain.

The ninth scene shows how Lord Rollo commands Birdy to immediately prepare to leave with the man he has chosen for her, without any regard for her feelings. This is seen in the dialogue: *"Put your hands down! The lord has officially proposed, and you must pack your bags, you must pack your bags at once!"* (Dunham, 2022, 01:07:10). Lord Rollo's command shows that Birdy's marriage is not determined by her desire but by her father's authority. She is given no space to think, feel, or question the decision. The scene uses a medium close-up shot and an eye-level angle to convey the emotions of both characters. Lord Rollo's expression is directed toward Birdy, indicating that he holds power and will force her to follow his will. His richly patterned robe in gold and cream symbolizes his social status and authority, while Birdy's orange-brown robe symbolizes her cheerfulness and enthusiasm to reject his wishes. The brown background depicts how deeply patriarchy has taken root in Birdy's environment and how she remains trapped within it. This aligns with Millett's (1970) view that women in patriarchal families are treated as property and can be transferred to any man the father chooses without consideration for their feelings or desires.

The tenth scene shows how the consequences of resistance to patriarchy are passed down through generations. Lady Aislinn reveals a scar she received from her own father for disobeying him. This is seen in the

dialogue: *"No, Bird. Fire touched me. It's why I tell you to obey. I was once willful too, and my father showed me how he felt about that with the iron. And so when you try so hard to bend the ways of the world, Bird, I cheer for you, but I also fear for you."* (Dunham, 2022, 01:11:07). Lady Aislinn's words reveal that the violence used to control women is not new but has been repeated across generations. She supports Birdy's resistance but warns her of the danger it brings. This scene uses a medium close-up and eye-level angle to depict the suffering shared by both women as they remain trapped in a patriarchal system. The darker background behind the pillow depicts the shadow of patriarchy that continues to linger in the women's lives, while the white pillow symbolizes the love they share as a refuge within the harshness of the system. This aligns with Millett's (1970) observation that the family functions as the means through which patriarchal values are socialized, and that physical punishment is one of the tools used by patriarchal authority to maintain obedience across generations.

Birdy's resistance to patriarchy in Catherine Called Birdy (2022)

After facing continuous pressure from her family and the society around her, Birdy gradually develops strategies to resist the patriarchal expectations imposed upon her life. Her resistance is not passive; it is deliberate, creative, and consistent. According to Millett (1970), patriarchal systems rely on obedience and conformity, but resistance occurs when women recognize unequal power relations and begin to challenge male authority that limits their independence. The following scenes present key findings that illustrate how Birdy resists patriarchal authority through her actions and decisions.

The first scene shows Birdy using her own body as a tool of resistance by hiding her menstrual rags to prevent her father from knowing she has reached adulthood. This is seen in the dialogue: *"I continue to hide my rags so that my father will not make me a wife and a mother. I will keep hiding them over and over, forever."* (Dunham, 2022, 00:19:22). By hiding evidence of her menstruation, Birdy takes back some control over her own body. She prevents her father from using her physical development as justification for forcing her into marriage. The scene uses a medium close-up shot and eye-level angle to focus on Birdy's determined expression, with a dark background but a small light on the right side of her face showing that, despite being surrounded by social pressure and her father's power, she still has the strength and courage to resist. Millett (1970) explains that in patriarchal systems, fathers hold authority over their daughters' bodies and decisions, including when and whom they should marry. Birdy's act of concealment is a direct challenge to that authority.

The second scene shows Birdy using a creative and indirect method to drive away a suitor by describing herself in a deliberately unattractive way. This is seen in the dialogue: "*A creature. A vile creature of vomit and hair and snot! And some say she has a third ear!*" (Dunham, 2022, 00:26:29). Through this statement, Birdy does not issue a direct rejection but instead describes herself as disgusting and strange to make herself unattractive to the suitor. This is a strategic and creative act of resistance that works within the system's logic since men choose women based on appearance and social standards. Birdy deliberately destroys her own image to make herself unchosen. The scene uses a long shot to show that even though patriarchy tries to control her life, she always has space to move and fight back. The eye-level angle shows that Birdy is not positioned as someone who must submit. The natural lighting and the background of large green hills and trees behind her are interpreted as Birdy's sense of freedom. This scene aligns with Millett's (1970) theory that patriarchy is not a natural system but a social construct that can be recognized and resisted.

The third scene shows Birdy directly confronting her father and refusing the suitor he has arranged for her. This is seen in the dialogue: "*I sent him away. I am not interested in meeting him nor any man with his intentions.*" (Dunham, 2022, 00:27:49). Birdy's statement is a direct and conscious rejection of patriarchal logic, which assumes that a man's intention to marry is automatically valid regardless of a woman's consent. The scene uses a medium shot and eye-level angle to show Birdy's refusal to be dominated, while Lord Rollo is shown through an over-the-shoulder shot to emphasize his despair at her defiance. The only lighting in the dark room comes from a candle behind Birdy, symbolizing the growing awareness and courage within her. The candlelight illuminating the dark room shows that Birdy lives under the pressure of patriarchal society, but there is a growing awareness and courage within her. This scene aligns with Millett's (1970) argument that patriarchy can be challenged when women are aware of it and firm in their resistance.

The fourth scene shows Birdy using her appearance as a form of resistance. When her father expects her to dress beautifully for a suitor, she deliberately wears a messy wig and strange clothing to make herself unattractive. This is seen in the context of Lord Rollo's statement to the suitor: "*My lord, she is just making herself beautiful for you.*" (Dunham, 2022, 00:39:21) [Birdy then enters wearing a messy wig and a strange outfit]. Lord Rollo treats Birdy as an object to be presented and evaluated by men. Birdy refuses to fulfill this role. By deliberately disrupting her own appearance, she rejects the patriarchal standard that a woman's value is determined by her

attractiveness to men. The scene uses a medium close-up and eye-level angle to focus on her facial expressions and body language, with her tangled hair, dirty face, and uncontrollable expression as signs of her resistance. The brighter light on Birdy against a darker background symbolizes her courage in standing out against the repressive system around her. Millett (1970) explains that patriarchy is not natural and therefore can be resisted. Birdy refuses to play the idealized feminine role expected of her, demonstrating that women can use their awareness of patriarchal control to actively resist it.

The fifth scene shows Birdy using both her appearance and her words to reject male expectations. She blackens her teeth and makes extreme statements to discourage a suitor. This is seen in the dialogue: *"I listen to God when he speaks to me. Usually, he tells me to form an army, 5,000 women strong and to go around and gut all men and leave their entrails as offering."* (Dunham, 2022, 00:40:20). Birdy deliberately ruins her appearance and makes violent statements to reject the beauty and behavioral standards imposed on women by men. Women are expected to be gentle, obedient, and polite, but Birdy shows the opposite. Through this action, she shows that she has control over her own body and refuses to be controlled by others. The scene uses a medium close-up shot and an eye-level angle to clearly show Birdy's facial expressions, especially her wide smile with blackened teeth, emphasizing her resistance through her own body and appearance. The bright light on Birdy's face against a darker background symbolizes her courage in resisting patriarchy, even though the environment around her is full of pressure. Millett (1970) explains that patriarchy is maintained through the family and through social constructions of femininity, but Birdy's actions show that she cannot be controlled because she refuses to be used as a tool for her father's interests.

The sixth scene shows Birdy using deliberate emotional performance to disrupt a suitor's interest in her. After learning that the man does not like women who cry, she climbs on the table and performs exaggerated crying. This is seen in the dialogue: *"Oh, criers? I am an expert crier, since the day I was born."* (Dunham, 2022, 01:02:28). In this situation, Birdy is expected to appear calm, polite, and pleasant. However, she deliberately performs exaggerated crying to disgust the suitor and destroy his interest in marrying her. Through this act, she takes control of her emotions and uses them as a tool against the system that expects her to perform femininity for men's approval. The scene uses a medium close-up and eye-level angle to show Birdy's actions against the patriarchal standard of a calm, polite, and obedient woman. The black background with a little orange color shows that even though Birdy is trapped in a patriarchal system, she has the courage and

bravery to resist it. The bright light on Birdy's side emphasizes that, despite the pressure and control from her father, she still has hope to fight it. Millett (1970) explains that patriarchal standards are social constructs that can be recognized and reversed, which is exactly what Birdy demonstrates by reclaiming her body and emotions on her own terms.

The seventh scene shows Birdy's clearest declaration of resistance. After her father temporarily postpones her marriage, Birdy releases her pet birds and reflects on what this means for her situation. This is seen in the dialogue: *"And I know he has not granted me a pardon, only a reprieve from the most ungodly beast of marriage, but my father will find that my gratitude does not mean I have lost my fight."* (Dunham, 2022, 01:38:59). Birdy understands that the temporary postponement of her marriage is not true freedom. Her father still holds control and will continue to look for opportunities to arrange her marriage. However, Birdy's statement shows that she has not surrendered. She is fully aware of the patriarchal system that controls her and makes clear that her resistance will continue. The scene uses a medium long shot and eye-level angle to show that while Birdy is still within the patriarchal structure, she is no longer submissive. She walks toward a window full of light, symbolizing that although she is not completely free, she is moving toward a better life. The surrounding background is still dark, but there are a few colors from some objects, symbolizing that the patriarchal system will continue to restrain her, but there is always a way for her to fight the system. Millett (1970) explains that patriarchy gives fathers almost complete power over their children's futures, but Birdy's awareness and determination show that this power can be met with continued resistance.

Discussion

The results show that Catherine Called Birdy (2022) portrays patriarchy as a system that operates primarily through the family, with the father figure at its center. This finding directly supports Millett's (1970) foundational argument that the family is the core institution of patriarchy — the primary site where gender hierarchy is established, taught, and reproduced across generations. The significance of this finding lies in its specificity: Lord Rollo's control over Birdy is not generalized male dominance but a structured, three-dimensional exercise of authority that Millett (1970) identifies as biological control (surveillance of her menstrual cycle to determine marriage readiness), social control (the expectation that she conform to the feminine ideal of obedience and submission), and economic control (the use of her marriage as a financial instrument to relieve the family's debts). That all three dimensions operate simultaneously within a

single family unit demonstrates how completely Millett's framework accounts for the mechanisms of patriarchal power, and confirms that the family remains its primary vehicle, even in a contemporary cinematic retelling of a medieval story. These findings are consistent with Kamila's (2024) study, which found that patriarchal culture limits women's access to autonomy and shapes their behavior to conform to male expectations, and extend that finding by showing how the mechanisms of such control are distributed not only through male authority but through the family's entire social architecture.

In addition, the results show that patriarchal control in the film is reinforced not only by male figures but also by women within the family. Morwenna's excitement about Birdy's first period and Lady Aislinn's warnings about the consequences of disobedience both reflect how patriarchal norms are socialized through the family structure. Millett (1970) explains that the family's primary contribution to patriarchy is the socialization of the young into prescribed gender roles through the example and guidance of parents. Therefore, patriarchy in the film is not simply about men controlling women but about an entire social system that conditions all of its members to accept and reproduce its values. This is consistent with Lerner's (1986) observation that patriarchal control, once institutionalized in the family, extends into wider social structures and becomes normalized across generations.

Furthermore, the results show that Birdy's resistance is not random or impulsive but strategic and purposeful. She hides her monthly rags, insults herself to discourage suitors, directly refuses arranged marriages, disrupts her own appearance, performs exaggerated crying, and clearly states that her fight will continue. These actions reflect a growing awareness of the patriarchal system that controls her and a determination to challenge it. This finding supports Millett's (1970) argument that because patriarchy is a social construct rather than a natural system, it is capable of dissolution. Butler (1990) similarly argued that gender is performative rather than innate, suggesting that the roles women are expected to perform can be subverted and resisted. When women recognize how patriarchy controls them, they can take action to resist and create change. Hooks (2000) emphasizes that resistance to patriarchy requires women to first name and recognize the system that oppresses them, a process clearly evident in Birdy's growing awareness throughout the film. Khofifah (2025) similarly found that female characters in film can demonstrate resistance against patriarchal roles through intelligence and courage. However, while Khofifah's (2025) analysis focused on a character who already held a position of power, this study

shows that resistance can also emerge from a position of powerlessness, where small, everyday acts of defiance are equally significant.

The cinematographic analysis further supports these findings. Brown (2016) explains that camera angles and shot types are used intentionally to convey meaning and emotion in a scene. Monaco (2000) similarly notes that cinema communicates meaning through a combination of visual grammar and narrative structure, making cinematographic choices inseparable from the ideological content they convey. In the film, Lord Rollo is consistently shown with dominant camera positioning, while Birdy is frequently shown in shots that emphasize her constrained position. However, in scenes of resistance, Birdy is shown with brighter lighting and eye-level angles, signaling her awareness and agency. Pratista (2008) notes that *mise-en-scène* provides audiences with insights into the characters, events, and overall atmosphere of a film, making visual elements an important layer of meaning that reinforces the verbal content of dialogue. Together, these visual and verbal elements produce a coherent and detailed representation of both patriarchal oppression and female resistance in the film.

In conclusion, *Catherine Called Birdy* (2022) presents a clear and detailed portrayal of how patriarchy operates within the family and how women can resist it through deliberate action. The findings show that patriarchy is deeply embedded in the social expectations, family dynamics, and physical control depicted in the film, but it is not absolute. Birdy's consistent resistance demonstrates that awareness and agency are powerful tools against a system that relies on obedience and conformity. By applying Millett's (1970) theory, this study shows that film analysis can reveal important insights into how gender power dynamics are constructed, maintained, and challenged in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Conclusion

This study finds that patriarchy in *Catherine Called Birdy* (2022) operates through the father figure's biological, social, and economic control over Birdy's body, decisions, and future, reinforced by women within the family who reproduce patriarchal norms across generations. Birdy resists this system through seven deliberate strategies, confirming that resistance can emerge from powerlessness through consistent, everyday acts of defiance. These findings demonstrate that Millett's (1970) theory remains an effective and relevant framework for analyzing gender power dynamics in contemporary cinema, and extend existing scholarship by showing that resistance can arise from the margins of a system rather than from positions

of institutional power. This study is limited to a single film and one theoretical framework; future research is recommended to apply Millett's theory alongside complementary approaches such as Walby's theory of patriarchal structures or intersectional feminist theory across a broader range of films and cultural contexts.

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